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Global Anthropocene Fiction And The Politics Of Climate Disaster

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Abstract

This dissertation examines contemporary literary depictions of climate change induced disasters through a South–South axis, exploring the resonances and dissonances between environmentalisms of the U.S. regional South and the global South. There are two driving factors for developing this framework. Within literary studies, numerous thinkers have, rightly, emphasized the asymmetrical relations between the global North and global South: historically, not only have countries from the North disproportionately contributed to the climate crisis, but they tend to funnel environmental toxicity into the "remote" South. I argue, however, that the resulting view of "the North" as destructive monolith often brushes past the unequal impacts of environmental violence within the North, obscuring the possibility of reading its marginalized regions in relation to the global South. This oversight, in turn, inhibits us from examining the shared histories, alliances, and imaginaries that exist between the regional South and the global South. My project attends to this discursive gap through a series of South–South comparative readings, with each pairing linked to a specific manifestation of climate disaster, such as hurricane, drought, and extinction.

In my project, Jesmyn Ward's Salvage the Bones and Monique Roffey's Archipelago model the complex temporalities of hurricanes, dislocating them from their typical associations with the swiftness of punctual violence. Paulo Bacigalupi's The Water Knife and Alexis Wright's The Swan Book tap into the scalar versatility of the bildungsroman form to communicate the developmental dynamics that lead to and exacerbate the conditions of megadrought in the Anthropocene. Linda Hogan's Power and Henrietta Rose-Innes's Green Lion craft a new literary technique to enact the ripple effects of keystone species extinction. Through a reading of Louise Erdrich's Future Home of the Living God, my coda on "hope" reflects on how storytelling can help us actualize ecologically just futures. My project thus illustrates how writers and activists working in anti-colonial contexts theorize and represent specific experiences of climate disaster, and it articulates the anti-imperial strategies of survival that cut across geopolitical borders. Most importantly, this comparative approach enables us to more fully reckon with the simultaneously global and uneven dimensions of the climate crisis.

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Martín Premoli

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GLOBAL ANTHROPOCENE FICTION AND THE POLITICS OF

CLIMATE DISASTER

For my parents.

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ABSTRACT

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Martín Premoli

Rita Barnard

This dissertation examines contemporary literary depictions of climate change induced disasters through a South–South axis, exploring the resonances and dissonances between environmentalisms of the U.S. regional South and the global South. There are two driving factors for developing this framework. Within literary studies, numerous thinkers have, rightly, emphasized the asymmetrical relations between the global North and global South: historically, not only have countries from the North disproportionately contributed to the climate crisis, but they tend to funnel environmental toxicity into the "remote" South. I argue, however, that the resulting view of "the North" as destructive monolith often brushes past the unequal impacts of environmental violence *within* the North, obscuring the possibility of reading its marginalized regions in relation to the global South. This oversight, in turn, inhibits us from examining the shared histories, alliances, and imaginaries that exist between the regional South and the global South. My project attends to this discursive gap through a series of South–South comparative readings, with each pairing linked to a specific manifestation of climate disaster, such as hurricane, drought, and extinction.

In my project, Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* and Monique Roffey's *Archipelago* model the complex temporalities of hurricanes, dislocating them from their typical associations with the swiftness of punctual violence. Paulo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* and

Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* tap into the scalar versatility of the bildungsroman form to communicate the developmental dynamics that lead to and exacerbate the conditions of megadrought in the Anthropocene. Linda Hogan's *Power* and Henrietta Rose-Innes's *Green Lion* craft a new literary technique to enact the ripple effects of keystone species extinction. Through a reading of Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*, my coda on "hope" reflects on how storytelling can help us actualize ecologically just futures. My project thus illustrates how writers and activists working in anti-colonial contexts theorize and represent specific experiences of climate disaster, and it articulates the anti-imperial strategies of survival that cut across geopolitical borders. Most importantly, this comparative approach enables us to more fully reckon with the simultaneously global and uneven dimensions of the climate crisis.

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INTRODUCTION

Anthropocene Fiction, Climate Disaster, and Geographical Intimacies

In the 2012 climate fiction novel *Flight Behavior*, Barbara Kingsolver tells the story of a family living in the southern Appalachian Mountains, a family whose lives are upended by a strange and unexpected occurrence precipitated by our planet's warming climate. The novel opens on a day in November when the novel's protagonist, Dellarobia Turnbow, who is deeply frustrated with her life, decides to run away and leave her family, including her two small children. Walking up a mountainside owned by her in-laws, she is suddenly stopped in her tracks, stunned by what she initially interprets to be a blazing storm of fire: "the flames now appeared to lift from individual treetops in showers of orange sparks, exploding the way a pine log does in a campfire when it is poked. The sparks spiraled upward in swirls like funnel clouds. Twisters of brightness against grey sky" (8). As she gets a closer look, however, she realizes that this fiery—and apocalyptic—panorama is not what it initially seems to be: the sparks and flames are in fact swarms of monarch butterflies, numbering in the millions, roosting in the hills and valleys that surround her home.

At this point in the narrative, Dellarobia does not realize why the butterflies have landed in rural Tennessee. But upon returning home, she meets with a group of entomologists who have travelled to Feathertown with the hopes of monitoring this anomalous migration. From them, she learns that the insects have changed their annual migratory route to accommodate the climatic disturbances wrought by global warming. As the novel later explains, each fall, North American monarchs (specifically Eastern monarchs) travel from their summer breeding grounds to overwintering locations in the mountains of Michoacán, Mexico—a journey of around 3,000 miles, which can last approximately two

months to complete.[1] This incredible migration pattern, the novel reveals, has been disrupted by destructive land-use practices, such as logging and deforestation, and the larger-scaled effects of anthropogenic climate change.[2] Kingsolver explains that the butterflies were dangerously exposed to higher winds and lower temperatures when the mountain-side forests of their accustomed roosting grounds were cleared away (this also left them more susceptible to rainfall, as they are not sheltered by foliage). Such ecologically impoverished circumstances have led (both in the novel, but also in the real world) to the radical diminishment of monarch butterfly populations, which have begun to cannonball toward extinction. For these reasons, the butterflies in Kingsolver's novel have sought new overwintering grounds in the southern Appalachian Mountains.[3]

Unfortunately for the butterflies, the logging epidemic that rendered their habitat in the global South unlivable begins to threaten their new sanctuary in rural Tennessee. This ecological threat arrives in the form of the California-based "Money Tree Industries," a logging corporation that capitalizes on the rampant unemployment and financial strain in an economically depressed Feathertown and makes an offer to purchase and log the Turnbow's land in the most injurious way possible: through clear-cutting. The family patriarch, Bear, makes a deal with Money Tree in order to avoid foreclosing on his family's farm, which he had used as collateral on a loan. Money Tree, the family soon discovers, intends to "clear-cut the whole deal at once" in an efficient but violent transaction that will destroy the life that the forest sustains and shelters, including the visiting monarch population (39). Through this

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[1] During this journey, monarch butterflies can travel between fifty and one-hundred miles a day.
[2] These conditions also lead to mudslides and flash-flooding.
[3] A footnote to the novel explains that while the butterflies are facing extinction (due to the loss of their roosting site in Mexico), they are not actually relocating to Tennessee. This aspect of the novel is fictionalized.

narrative development, Kingsolver chronicles southern Appalachia's troubled history with resource extraction (which, uncoincidentally, echoes the resource extraction experienced in Michoacán): as Heather Houser explains, "subsistence living on the commons, strong in nineteenth-century Appalachia, gave way to intensive extraction of timber and coal in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Forms of work that … have ravaged environment, body, and spirit alike" (95). As if following in Mexico's footsteps, this region of Southern Appalachia appears well on the path to becoming an "energy sacrifice zone"—a place where "lives are valued less than the natural resources that can be extracted from the region" (Buckley and Allen 171).

The dire circumstances that the butterflies will soon face in her hometown (which they have already faced in central Mexico) catalyze a process of intellectual and personal transformation in Dellarobia: she becomes a protector of the local forest and an environmentalist with a cosmopolitan orientation. In an effort to learn more about local fauna, for instance, Dellarobia turns toward the expertise of local botanist, Hester. A lifelong resident of Feathertown, Hester shows Dellarobia a hidden path into the forest where she foraged for wild mushrooms decades ago. There Hester spots a species of late winter flowers, which her mom called "harbingers" and that others called "salt-and-pepper flower[s]" (347). With her knowledge of a distinctly Appalachian vocabulary, she teaches Dellarobia demotic species names and gives her hope for the monarchs' prospects: the flowers fill the role of a food source for the butterflies, helping them to survive the erratic winter weather. Beyond this, Dellarobia opens up her family's land, allowing activists from across the U.S. to setup a temporary base (and forage for food) as they protest Money Tree's plans to clear the forest.

Just as importantly, Dellarobia uses her local knowledge and positionality to forge translocal connections with environmentalists from beyond Tennessee. After learning about the nutritional capacities of the harbinger flower, she shares this information with Ovid Byron, a lepidopterist and biologist from Saint John, Virgin Islands. Ovid and his team are temporarily staying in Feathetown to study the butterfly population, after having tracked them through New Mexico. With the knowledge shared by Dellarobia, they develop several conservation strategies that would potentially increase the insects' chances at survival. Ovid, too, shares his knowledge with Dellarobia: through his training as a scientist, he helps her more fully understand the monarchs' precarious plight and humans' part in it as drivers of climate change. Through conversations with Ovid, Dellarobia begins to grasp the concept "of weather as everything. … Real, in a way that the window and house were not" (319). She learns a similar lesson from the Delgados, a family of climate refugees from Michoacán, Mexico, who arrive on the Turnbow farm after their mountain-side home and community were washed away by severe mudslides and rainstorms. By interacting with and housing the Delgados, Dellarobia learns of the extent to which humans, too, have been affected by the uneven consequences of climate violence. These interactions and conversations ultimately inspire her decision to return to school in order to become a biologist.

Together, then, the characters and circumstances in Kingsolver's novel give life to a unique and unexpected expression of environmental consciousness—one that responds to environmental degradation not with despair, but with inquiry, unexpected cooperation, the embrace of various environmentalisms, and a dedication to climate justice across hemispheres.

Navigating the Tensions of the Anthropocene

I begin with this account of *Flight Behavior* as a way of introducing and dramatizing the central intervention that lies at the heart of this dissertation: in essence, this dissertation argues that Anthropocene discourse would greatly benefit from examining the resonances and dissonances that exist between environmentalisms of the U.S. regional South and global South. The need for this claim stems from the fact that critical debates about the Anthropocene often struggle with a central and divisive tension, one that speaks to the term's representational capacity and limits. On the one hand, the Anthropocene is meant to index a *collective* story regarding humankind's impact on the earth and its geophysical systems. This perspective emphasizes climate change as global dilemma, caused by the human species writ large. (This is evidenced in the novel by the fact that the butterflies' new roosting site, which is situated in the global North, has begun to experience unexpected weather events and is targeted as a site for deforestation.) On the other hand, the Anthropocene tells a narrative of *division*, chronicling the widening disparities between the world's wealthiest and poorest populations. The narrative of division highlights the various ways in which environmental violence is disproportionately created and differentially distributed, particularly along the lines of race, class, and gender. (The novel registers this fact by showcasing how the meteorological and extractive events happening on the Turnbow's land have *already happened*, to an astonishing degree, in Michoacán, Mexico). Thus, the Anthropocene, as Rob Nixon puts it, seeks to tell "two large stories that can often seem in tension with each other." And in an attempt to navigate this tension, critical investigations have often privileged one vantage over the other, unfortunately reducing the complexity of this world-altering dilemma.

A comparative South-South axis, however, transforms the possible tension of these two stories into an opportunity for developing a new environmental imagination. (This, too,

Kingsolver's novel illustrates through Dellarobia's transformative collaboration with the Delgado family and with Ovid Byron). By exploring the unexpected continuities created by climate change, a South-South comparative framework encourages a productive intimacy between the nation that historically has contributed most to environmental breakdown and the nations that most directly bear the brunt of the planet's ecological crises. This intimacy, moreover, illuminates some of the shared histories, alliances, and imaginaries that exist between the regional South and the global South. In doing so, my project allows for both the global (in that it attends to the climate-affected spaces of the global North) and uneven (in that it examines how climate blowback is disproportionately felt in the global South) dimensions of climate change to co-exist in ways that are generative and revelatory, rather than divisive and reductive. This comparative and collaborative approach to the Anthropocene is thus crucial for reflecting upon and critically (re)evaluating what can be done to create more ecologically just futures.

This dissertation accomplishes this task through an examination of contemporary narrative fiction about climate induced disaster. I develop and employ a South-South comparative approach, pairing novels from the U.S. regional South with novels from the global South. Each chapter focuses on a specific manifestation of climate disaster that straddles and crosses the world's geographical and geopolitical borders. This includes hurricanes, drought, and mass species extinction; the project concludes with a coda on survival. As a result of this framework, my project constellates an archive of Anthropocene fiction that transcends disciplinary borders and restrictions, examining well-known examples of environmental fiction alongside novels that have not yet garnered wide-spread attention. This includes texts from the U.S., the Caribbean, Australia, and South Africa.

In the pages that follow, I introduce and elaborate on the various critical frameworks that my project operationalizes to manifest and execute its argument. This will take place across three main sections. In the first section, I discuss how literary studies, specifically, is useful for illuminating and responding to the complex issues indexed by disaster in the Anthropocene. This section focuses on the possibilities afforded by the novel form, by genre, and by plot. The second section explores the unprecedented scale and reach of so-called natural disaster in the Anthropocene. My project develops the idea of abnatural disaster, a term which emphasizes the social, political, and economic processes that put particular groups at risk and underpin the scope of disasters today. Finally, in the last section, I introduce the South-South axis materialized by abnatural disaster. This section discusses the comparative framework that my project deploys, and further delineates the insights such an approach might yield. To conclude, I will provide a summary of the chapters that comprise this dissertation.

A Literary Anthropocene

To make the critical interventions outlined above, my project situates itself within the field of the environmental humanities. The term "environmental humanities" is both descriptive and aspirational: it has emerged over the last decade as a way of capturing already existing convergences across political ecology, environmental philosophy, environmental history, ecocriticism, cultural geography, and cultural anthropology, but it also seeks to cultivate and incorporate debates so far largely shaped by different disciplinary contexts, particularly within the hard sciences.[4] At the core of this wide-ranging approach, lies a focus

[4] For a more in-depth examination of the history of the environmental humanities, see Ursula Heise's essay "What is the Environmental Humanities?" or the essay "Mapping Common Ground: Ecocriticism, Environmental History, and the Environmental Humanities," which can be found in the *Environmental Humanities* journal.

on examining the numerous, inextricable ways in which diverse human cultures have made themselves at home in a more than human world. As Thom van Dooren puts it, "the environmental humanities positions us as participants in lively ecologies of meaning and value, entangled within rich patterns of cultural and historical diversity that shape who we are and the ways in which we are able to 'become with' others" (2). In various ways, then, this field has been useful for understanding what might be gained from the intentional combination and careful intermixing of different disciplinary approaches, and it illustrates the intellectual promise that thinking across disciplines can furnish.

My project participates in this venture from an ecocritical perspective, asking how literary studies, in particular, can contribute to these aspirations.[5] Undoubtedly, literary studies has already proven to be a lively site of debate for the environmental humanities. One of the perhaps most infamous and provocative texts in this field is Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement,* which examines our culture's "imaginative failure" in grasping and representing the realities of the climate crisis. According to Ghosh, the failure of the literary imagination largely pertains to the generic conventions—and restrictions—of the modern novel, a form which was "midwifed into existence through the banishing of the improbable and the insertion of the everyday" (34). The dominance of this mode of writing has continued to this day, Ghosh argues, resulting in a literary landscape that is sparsely

[5] As Heise explains in her essay "Science and Ecocriticism," "Ecocriticism analyzes the role that the natural environment plays in the imagination of a cultural community at a specific historical moment, examining how the concept of 'nature' is defined, what values are assigned to it or denied it and why, and the way in which the relationship between humans and nature is envisioned. More specifically, it investigates how nature is used literally or metaphorically in certain literary or aesthetic genres and tropes, and what assumptions about nature underlie genres that may not address this topic directly. This analysis in turn allows ecocriticism to assess how certain historically conditioned concepts of nature and the natural, and particularly literary and artistic constructions of it, have come to shape current perceptions of the environment."

populated by fictional attempts to seriously engage with large-scale environmental degradation and the violence of climate change. And what's more, the little writing that there is on the subject is most often relegated to the "low" genre of science fiction.[6]

Other critics, however, have argued precisely the opposite, framing literature and literary studies as a compelling pathway for grappling with the concerns of anthropogenic climate change. In one of the earlier engagements with ecocrtiticism, Lawrence Buell argues that literary studies can enable the "reorientation of human attention and values according to a stronger ethic of care for the nonhuman environment [in order to] make the world a better place, for humans as well as for nonhumans" (6).[7] Most relevant to my project are global Anglophone, Indigenous, and postcolonial ecocritics, whose work emphasizes the enmeshment of empire and ecological violence.[8] Exploring this interconnection, they argue, allows us to understand how dominant notions of what counts as environmentalist action, thought, and writing have been shaped by larger systems of power and domination. These visions of Environmentalism are thus assumed by those who generate them to be objective and universal, and they have been crucial components of imperialism (past and present) as it has worked to gain its foothold on the world. Gaining awareness of environmentalism's situatedness provides an opportunity for engaging with the diverse genealogies of

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[6] As my project makes clear, this is not a view that I necessarily share.

[7] Other important ecocritics for my project are Stacy Alaimo, Greg Garrard, Stephanie LeMenager, and Dana Phillips.

[8] Rob Nixon identifies four "schisms" between postcolonial and ecocritical priorities and viewpoints: hybridity versus purity, displacement versus place, transnationalism versus a national (American) canon, and submerged histories versus timelessness ("Environmentalism and Postcolonialism" 235). Anthony Vital suggests that discursive approaches in postcolonial studies (or, we might say, in the version of postcolonial studies most influenced by poststructuralism) have clashed with ecocriticism's emphasis on material reality. Vital suggests reconciling these priorities by attending to "the complex interplay of social history with the natural world" and to "how language both shapes and reveals such interactions" ("Toward an African Ecocriticism" 90).

environmental studies and with the wide spectrum of what counts as environmentalism in different parts of the world. Postcolonial critics thus stress how other (and "othered") environmentalist perspectives urge to challenge and rethink dominant, mainstream assumptions and the violent occlusions they might cultivate. Moreover, as explained by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, postcolonial ecocriticism "performs an advocacy function both in relation to the real world(s) it inhabits and to the imaginary spaces it opens up for contemplation of how the real world might be transformed" (13).[9]

My dissertation aligns itself with these thinkers, and further contributes to the work they have begun by investigating three central (yet underexplored) ecocritical concerns: First, how does *the novel* enable us to narrate the problem of climate change? Second, what role(s) do specific *genres* play in this act of narration? Third, how do novels *plot* ecological change? These points of intervention resonate with the objectives of eco-criticism and EH scholarship more broadly, urging to us examine ourselves and the world around us, and to critique the way that we represent, interact with, and construct the environment, both "natural" and "cultural."

The Novel as Climate Model:

This project's first critical intervention is to argue for the novel as an especially compelling alternative to computer climate models for understanding and intervening in the issues raised by global warming today. In making this case, my project builds on the work of Jesse Oak Taylor, whose book, *The Sky of Our Manufacture: The London Fog in British Fiction from Dickens to Woolf*, explores the emergence of anthropogenic climate change by examining

[9] Thinkers in this field who have shaped my thinking, and whose work permeates this project, include Rob Nixon, Elizbeth DeLoughrey, Ursula Heise, Byron Caminero-Santangelo, Joni Adamson, Ashley Dawson, Brooke Stanley, and Jennifer Wenzel.

"depictions of the London fog in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novel" (2). In his book, Taylor tracks the evolution and various manifestations of the London fog, and persuasively rethinks how we understand the forms that systems of climate modeling can take, arguing for the novel's potential as climate model:

> modeling climate change, whether in political, aesthetic, or material terms entails the juxtaposition of discrete events in time and space in order to plot a meaningful trajectory, which is precisely what novels do. The novel is well suited to the challenges of modeling climate as both a historical and meteorological condition because its expansive scale and diffusive complexity interact with the temporality of reading (5).

As an alternative climate model, Taylor suggests, the novel is not primarily a reflection or effect of material conditions, but a useful abstraction: it allows us to grasp relations between the institutional, geological, meteorological, social, and economic factors that make up the climate, which cannot be directly represented or known. This ability is particularly important within the context of climate change—a "hyperobject" of dizzying complexity, which extends across farflung scales of time and place and which defies total comprehension by the human subject as well as the most sophisticated systems of computer climate modelling.[10] It is for this reason that we need a mediating abstraction—the novelistic form—to help us to imagine, understand, and act on the problem of anthropogenic climate change. With its ability to link monumental shifts in time (connecting the rise of agriculture to futuristic visions of post-apocalyptic drought, for example) and its capacity for traversing disparate spaces and different species (in order to tell the story of the disappearance of frog

[10] Here I recall the work of Timothy Morton in *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*.

populations across the Caribbean, to take another example), the novel can convincingly simulate both the intimate details and general contours of our increasingly warming world.[11]

In this vein, my project coincides with geographer Mike Hulme's directive for the need to develop a wider array of climate models—ones based on "contingent, imaginative, and humanistic accounts of social life and visions of the future"—in order to counteract the hegemony of climate models developed within the natural sciences and their problematic tendencies toward climate determinism (245). Instead of rooting the climate discourse solely in the knowledge claims of natural sciences and framing it as a numerical problem that can be solved, there is a need to understand climate change as a political and social construction *as well as* a physical reality. Opening up climate change discourse in this fashion allows us to engage with the affective dimensions of our climate crisis, offering us a way of understanding our species being, our humanity, in a manner that is differently—and deeply—interwoven with the natural world.

The Genres of Climate Change:

Having laid bare some of the imaginative possibilities afforded by the novel, my project argues that literary genre can effectively illuminate the architecture and multi-scalar dynamics of life in the Anthropocene. Stephanie LeMenager's recent article, "Climate Change and the Struggle for Genre," issues a call for a renewed focus on genre within literary studies, one that is prompted by the ways in which life as many humans know it is changing at a pace and scale difficult to imagine. As she explains, "our current experience of genre trouble comes about when the affective expectations we hold for how things unfold,

[11] Moreover, because my project examines contemporary novels (Oak Taylor focuses on 19th and early 20th century fiction), a number of my texts directly critique or discuss contemporary, computer-generated climate models.

in art and life, do not make sense anymore. … Artistic genres are fraying, recombining, or otherwise moving outside of our expectations of what they ought to be because life itself is moving outside of our expectations for what it ought to be" (476-77). Under this generic dissolution, then, it becomes necessary to consider how the Anthropocene encourages new representational regimes for imagining life in a climate-changed world.

LeMenager's work considers genre from a capacious, rather undefined, framework. Inspired by Lauren Berlant's conception of genre, her essay is interested in how attending to genre can reveals the affective structures (the "atmospheric mode") of life in the everyday Anthropocene. As such, genre for Berlant and LeMenager signifies our culture's prevailing symptoms of expectation and new patterns of social need.[12] While my project understands the way that genre can capture these quotidian social attitudes and desires, it channels a more conventional conception of literary genre (in dialogue with the work of Alistair Fowler and Thomas Pavel) and thus understands it as an identifiable (though ever-shifting) pattern, a flexible set of writerly techniques that can be adapted according to the needs of its users.

My project's engagement with genre thus clears spaces for understanding how writers deploy and shift certain writerly techniques to alter the imagined infrastructures and social conditions of literary worlds. Consistent with the overall methodology of this project, I approach questions of genre from an anti-colonial perspective. In doing so, my project focuses on the use of the conventions of literary genre to shatter the deadly racial restrictions that have been and are still being naturalized into our environmental imagination—what April Anson understands as an act of "genrecide." The term builds off adrienne maree brown's *Emergent Strategy*, where brown refers to genrecide as the use of genre to "disrupt the

[12] Berlant writes, "genre provides an affective expectation of the experiences of watching something unfold, whether that thing is in life or in art" (6-7).

single white male hero narrative" and intentionally blur the fictional boundaries that shape our worlds (163). From this vantage, I argue that genre can be understood as tool for staying with the trouble in the Anthropocene and imagining beyond the end of those white worlds.

Plotting Ecological Breakdown:

Narrowing from novel to genre to plot, my project's third intervention concerns the complications and insights provoked by attempts to "plot" the Anthropocene and ecological breakdown. In his classic, *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks conceives of plot as "the design and intention of narrative, what shapes a story and gives it a certain direction or intent of meaning. [It is] the logic or perhaps the syntax of a certain kind of discourse, one that develops its propositions only through temporal sequence and progression" (x). Plot, in other words, can be understood as the syntax of a certain way of speaking our understanding *of the world*. Building on this framework, Brooks proposes that a desire for closure is what carries readers of narrative "forward, onward, through the text," and that such desire can only be fulfilled retrospectively, with the understanding that the ending brings: "Those shaping ends … that promise to bestow meaning and significance on the beginning and the middle (37, 19). Endings undoubtedly necessitate reinterpretations of events earlier in the plot, as Brooks suggests, and they also provide the closure that enables meaning making. That is, readers move forward in a narrative with the anticipation of retrospection.

As numerous scholars have noted, climate change actively eludes, confounds, and evades plotting (along with narrative closure). Nevertheless, as this project illustrates, novelists have dreamed up unexpected structures for plotting the Anthropocene's mixed temporalities and scales. In devising new ways of plotting, novelists must also formulate new conceptions of closure, ones which do justice to the creeping and incomplete nature of climate change futures. In this light, reading, as an act of meaning-making, takes on new

urgency in the Anthropocene—it figures as a way of making sense of the end of the world as we know it, in order to imagine livable futures in alternative worlds.

Each of the points explicated above is directly addressed in a specific chapter of the dissertation. Thus, each of the chapters might be read as a stand-alone piece, which examines and engages with a particular concern that lies at the intersection literary studies and the environmental studies. My intention, however, is for these chapters to be read in order and in their entirety. In subtle but crucial ways—ways that will hopefully crystallize as the reader moves through the project—each point of intervention builds on the one that precedes it, taking into consideration both concepts and ethical investments that are explored more deeply in earlier chapters. As such, the project begins with broader questions (Is the novel useful for modeling climates? In what ways?) and incrementally narrows to the more specific (What genres of the novel are particularly apt for modelling climate? And what are the affordances of these genres?).

Abnatural Disaster

As the dissertation makes clear, these literary concerns are routed through the framework of disaster. Disaster studies has proven to be a particularly vibrant—if contentious—area of study within the environmental humanities and related fields. Numerous scholars have begun to unpack and re-theorize the contours of disaster and disaster response in the context of Anthropogenic climate change.[13] Nevertheless, there remain important and unresolved tensions that merit further consideration.

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[13] See, for example, the work of Scott Knowles (*The Disaster Experts*), Rob Nixon (*Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*), Anthony Carrigan ("Towards a Postcolonial Disaster Studies"), Kate Rigby (*Dancing with Disaster*), and Mark Anderson (*Disaster Writing*).

The prominence of this field, in part, is tied to the transformative force of disaster: nothing destabilizes one's worldview more than the experience of disaster. In its broadest sense, disaster simply connotes disordering, a breaking of limits or structural norms in which nonhuman nature may or may not be implicated. Natural disaster, more specifically, underscores the calamitous (typically sudden) event that supersedes human agency and responsibility: the devastation of a tsunami rather than insufficiently constructed and unwisely located housing, the tragedy of a drought resulting from unaccountable weather fluctuations rather than an accumulation of greenhouse gases. Natural disaster thus signals the non-traversable distance between human beings and an indifferent natural world (as such, they are sometimes understood as "acts of God"). The conceit of natural disaster maintains that humankind's most primal struggle is with those environmental forces that reside beyond human control.

In recent years, however, the allegedly "non-traversable" distance between human beings and the indifferent natural world has all but evaporated (or, at least, the common perception that such a distance ever existed has evaporated). As human interference with the "natural" world has intensified, and as our awareness of human-nature entanglement grows and solidifies, numerous writers and thinkers have argued for replacing the category of natural disaster with the category of the "social disaster." In the essay, "Apocalypse: What Disasters Reveal," for example, the novelist Junot Diaz issues the bold claim that "there are no natural disasters, only social ones. … We must refuse the old stories that tell us to interpret social disasters as natural disasters" (6). Discussing the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Diaz examines how the island-nation's colonial history and its ongoing struggles with neoliberal globalization have amplified the scope and scale of disaster. The deadly confluence of political corruption, poor infrastructure, massive poverty, and debt, in other

words, constitutes the true nature of disaster. As Diaz evocatively puts it, "disasters don't just happen. They are always made possible by a series of often-invisible societal choices that implicate more than just those being drowned or buried in rubble" (6). Working from this perspective, the framework of social disaster urges members of society to take responsibility for the social practices that bring about disasters, and moreover it can inspire the collective response that is needed for the alleviation of disaster.

While it's important to nuance our understanding of natural disaster by attending to its social motivators, this project proposes an alternative framing of disaster, one that does not reduce disaster to either side of the nature-culture or human-nonhuman binary. In place of the aforementioned definitions, this project proposes and theorizes an understanding of *abnatural disaster*. This term, which is inspired by the eco-critical work of Jesse Oak Taylor, draws upon the etymological versatility of the prefix ab- which "means both away from and derived from" and thus speaks to "both nature's absence and its uncanny persistence … it characterizes those moments in which nature appears other to itself, beside or outside itself" (5). For Oak Taylor, the abnatural underscores those moments when we are pushed to acknowledge that the world does not comply with our ideas of "nature." With this in mind, it offers a conceptual framework for dwelling meaningfully and mindfully in the Anthropocene.[14]

Thinking about disaster as abnatural, therefore, engenders a perspective that understands climate change-related disasters as dynamic, interactive phenomena, co-created by systems of weather and human subjects. Abnatural disasters cannot be understood as

[14] Oak Taylor elaborates on this by noting that the "abnatural" characterizes the "felt presence of an absence, a partial glimpse of an open whole … [it] attends to the way nature always eludes domestication" (6).

solely "natural" (which obviates the necessity and ethical responsibility of making profound structural changes) or "social/structural" (which ignores the role of the non-human as active and agential). Rather, it is vital to think of them as *both* social and natural phenomena, the duality of which becomes apparent during disaster in the Anthropocene.

In existing at this intersection, abnatural disaster troubles the potentially reductive or restrictive temporalities that we associate disaster with; they vex distinctions between fast and slow forms of environmental disaster, illustrating how more punctual forms of wreckage are entangled with everyday or quotidian forms of violence. Abnatural disasters, in other words, move at multiple speeds and, in doing so, potentially occult—and also uncannily index—our originary or causal place in the creation of climate change. This long reach also operates on a spatial scale: abnatural disasters manifest across vast, seemingly disconnected geographies, troubling the geopolitical limits imposed by the nation-state system. In doing so, they call into question notions of response, recovery, and responsibility.

To illustrate the abnatural qualities of disaster in the Anthropocene, I'd like to turn to the figure of the hurricane. In recent years, we have experienced a startling number of hurricanes in the Atlantic. On August 17th, 2017, for example, Hurricane Harvey struck the East coast of Texas, displacing thousands and leaving much of Houston submerged in a toxic mixture of water and chemicals from the city's colossal oil refineries. Farther south, on August 30th, 2017, Hurricane Irma, the first Category 5 storm of the 2017 hurricane season, swept through the Atlantic, impacting about a dozen islands across the Caribbean archipelago. And almost immediately after, the second Category 5 storm of 2017's hurricane season, Hurricane Maria, formed in the Lesser Antilles, quickly developing into one of the most devastating tropical cyclones on record.

The historian Stuart Schwartz, in his book *Sea of Storms*, explains that scientific communities define hurricanes as "violent cyclonic storms, usually but not always accompanied by very heavy rainfall. In the North Atlantic, they often form in the area where the prevailing northeasterly trade winds meet southeasterly winds rising from south of the equator…" (xiv). During the summer months, he continues, warm moisture in the lower atmosphere is heated by the summer sun and rises into these unstable and clashing air currents, forming low-pressure cells that develop over tropical or sub-tropical oceans. This process of convection results, under "favorable" circumstances, in the forming storm's intensification—a process that continues to grow as clashing winds spiral in a counterclockwise rotation. As this process continues, hurricanes take on their frightening scale: their winds can surpass 175 miles per hour and they extend their reach to between 300 and 500 miles, and sometimes more. Through Schwartz's work, readers are thus familiarized with a widespread scientific perspective that understands the hurricane as a force that is fueled primarily by the complex dynamics between sea, wind, and the earth's rotation.

Scientists (such as atmospheric chemists and oceanographers, among others) have begun to unpack the various ways in which anthropogenic climate changes has altered the weather patterns of hurricanes. According to atmospheric scientist Kerry Emanuel, there are three primary, interrelated factors tied to global warming that have changed the typical formation of hurricanes within the Caribbean, pushing them into the territory of what I call abnatural disaster.[15] The first of these factors pertains to the increase in air and water temperatures around the world, which has resulted primarily from an increase, by some humans, in fossil-fuel combustion and carbon dioxide emission (along with a number of

[15] Kerry Emanuel is an atmospheric scientist at MIT who has published numerous texts on this subject. See, for example, *Divine Wind: The History and Science of Hurricanes*.

other greenhouse gases such as methane and nitrous oxide) into the earth's atmosphere.[16] As more and more carbon dioxide is released into the air, more heat becomes trapped in the atmosphere—a result of carbon's "ability to affect the transfer of infrared energy" (NASA). This increase in the world's surface temperature is absorbed by the ocean (with the top 700 meters, about 2,300 feet, of ocean showing warming of 0.302 degrees Fahrenheit since 1969), which then, in turn, releases more warm water vapor back into the atmosphere.[17] Hurricanes, as I've mentioned above, are fueled by the confluence of warm air and water, and are thus drastically intensified by the conditions of our increasingly warming atmosphere.

Along with increases in surface temperature, a host of researchers understand the earth's rising sea levels (which have come about as a result of shrinking ice-sheets in the earth's polar regions, glacial retreat, and decreased snow cover) as another vital factor to take into consideration in order to understand hurricane amplification (NASA). The three factors mentioned above (shrinking ice-sheets, glacial retreat, decreased snow cover) have led, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists, "to global average sea level to rise by roughly 7-8 inches since 1900—a trend that is expected to accelerate over coming decades" (NASA). This trend, moreover, is exacerbated by the intensification of "positive feedback loops," which exponentially increase the damage wrought by rising atmospheric

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[16] A recent article from the Times communicates the urgency of this situation by explaining that "The level of the most important heat-trapping gas in the atmosphere, carbon dioxide has passed a long-feared milestone … reaching a concentration not seen on the earth for millions of years."

[17] NASA reports that, "the planet's average surface temperature has risen about 1.62 degrees Fahrenheit (0.9 degrees Celsius) since the late 19th century, a change driven largely by increased carbon dioxide and other human-made emissions into the atmosphere. Most of the warming occurred in the past 35 years, with the five warmest years on record taking place since 2010."

temperatures. In the case of shrinking ice-sheets, for example, more sunlight is absorbed into the dark ocean and less is reflected back into space, causing further warming and further melting of ice. In their report, the scientists at UCS also note that higher sea levels provide coastal storm surges with a higher starting point when major storms approach and pile water up along the shore. The resulting storm surge reaches higher and penetrates further inland in low-lying areas, a risk that is further amplified when hurricanes and other storms make landfall during high tides. Adding to this, is the fact that water expands as it warms—what scientists refer to as "thermal expansion." This phenomenon leads to sea level rise even in the absence of ice and glacial melt.

Finally, a significant number of climate scientists have identified (urban) development along coastal areas as a major factor in the human-induced intensification of hurricanes. While the connection between coastal development and the intensification of hurricanes may not be immediately apparent, a study in the scientific journal *PLOS One* has argued for "the effectiveness of coastal habitats (natural defences) in reducing wave heights" and has examined "the biophysical parameters that influence this effectiveness" (online). When "natural" defenses—such as mangroves, which absorb water, and coral reefs, which act as subaquatic seawalls—are removed, re-situated, or built over, as has often been the case in engineering projects that take place in and around watersheds and wetlands, more water is displaced into the ocean, leading to the further magnification of hurricanes as they develop and eventually make landfall.

Combined, these three factors highlight the complexity (and necessity) of conceptualizing hurricanes as abnatural disasters. As feminist philosopher Nancy Tuana insightfully puts it, hurricanes are prime examples of "the viscous porosity" between humans and our environment, between social practices and natural phenomena. They exist, she

explains "through a process of constant becoming, in which unity is dynamic and through which agency is always enacted in a complex web of relations" (192). The study of hurricanes, in other words, allows us to recognize that "there is no sharp ontological divide [between human and environment], but rather a complex interaction of phenomena" (193).[18]

Theorizing (Climate Change) from the South

To track and conceptualize the growing reach, frequency, and impact of abnatural disasters, my project develops and deploys a South-South comparative framework—one that is attentive to climate disaster as global-yet-uneven phenomena. Despite its promise, such an approach to anthropogenic climate change has not yet been undertaken. The reason for this omission has been persuasively articulated by the literary critic Rob Nixon, in his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. In this book, Nixon admits that it is certainly true that "the U.S. empire has historically been a variable force, one that is not monolithic but subject to ever-changing internal fracture. The U.S., moreover, has long been—and is increasingly—globalized itself with all the attendant insecurities and inequities that result" (34). However, he stresses, "to argue that the United States is subject to globalization—

[18] I find Nancy Tuana's work on "viscous porosity" to be immensely helpful for my own understanding of this issue. She explains that she "does not mean that we cannot attempt to determine the extent to which human factors increased the intensity of a hurricane or some other weather-related phenomena. … Distinctions can be made, which is why I employ the phrase 'viscous porosity' rather than 'fluidity.' *Viscosity* is neither fluid nor solid, but intermediate between them. Attention to the *porosity* of interactions helps to undermine the notion that distinctions, as important as they might be in particular contexts, signify a natural or boundary, a natural kind. At the same time, 'viscosity' retains an emphasis on resistance to changing form, thereby a more helpful image than 'fluidity,' which is too likely to promote a notion of open possibilities and to overlook sites of resistance and opposition or attention to the complex ways in which material agency is often involved in interactions, including, but not limited to, human agency" (193). It's worth mentioning that all fluids all fluids that we encounter under ordinary conditions, including the prototypical fluid water, have some viscosity— is a property of fluids that has to do with the internal friction of the fluid itself. Nevertheless, Tuana draws upon a cultural (though perhaps less-scientific) understanding of viscosity, which considers it to be "thicker" than fluidity, to make her point.

through, for example, blowback from climate change—does not belie the disproportionate impact that U.S. global ambitions and policies have exerted over socioenvironmental landscapes internationally" (34). The U.S. Empire's outsized participation in and amplification of petro-imperialism, the megadam industry, out-sourced toxicity, neocolonial tourism, antihuman conservation practices, corporate and environmental deregulation, and the militarization of commerce make a U.S. and global South comparison impossible—the differences between the world's rich and the global poor are simply too stark.[19]

There is certainly much value to be found in keeping in mind the ways in which environmental violence is disproportionately created and differentially distributed, with those in the global South (who have done much less to contribute to climate change) suffering most directly from its ecological blowback—this is not a point I wish to contest. However, as Amitav Ghosh writes in *The Great Derangement*, our contemporary climatic conditions "defy the boundedness of 'place,' creating continuities of experience between Bengal and Louisiana, New York and Mumbai, Tibet and Alaska" and thus create "unbearably intimate connections over vast gaps in time and space" (62, 63). These climatic continuities, my project illustrates (and as the hurricane example above reflects), are especially strong between the U.S. South and the global South.

To illustrate Ghosh's claim (and the potential of a South-South axis), I'd like once more to turn to the category of hurricane-disaster—specifically, 2005's Hurricane Katrina. In numerous and striking ways, Hurricane Katrina serves as a paramount case-study for

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[19] Nixon argues for the necessity of a critical perspective that takes into account the asymmetrical relations that exist between the U.S. and the global South, between a "domestically regulated environment and [the] unregulated environments abroad" (35). To examine this power asymmetry, Nixon develops an analytical approach that shuttles between critiques of resurgent imperialism in the North, analyses of translocal linkages across the global South, and investigations of South-North alliances across the hemispheres

examining the ambivalent relationships and the connections that exist between the U.S. South and the global South. On the one hand, compared to other disasters that have taken place across the globe, Hurricane Katrina saturated the American media's attention (the storm brought a dramatic rise in the role of internet sites, especially blogging and community journalism), and announcers continued to broadcast from improvised studio facilities after the storm damaged their main studios (similar hurricanes in the Caribbean, as we have seen, do appear in the American news, but fade much more quickly from national headlines). And within the realm of aesthetics and cultural production, Katrina holds a similarly significant weight, with numerous films, television shows, photo-projects, essays, and documentaries chronicling the disaster and its consequences (compared to a dearth of artistic objects and aesthetic representations focused on flooding in Mumbai, for example).[20] As a result of this attention, Katrina received a vast amount of financial relief, particularly when compared to many disasters that occur in the global South. With these points in mind, we recognize the ways in which the United States is not, to use Nixon's terms, "subject to globalization" in the same manner as other (i.e. postcolonial) parts of the world.

On the other hand, Katrina also enables us to see how climate change—and the forms of catastrophe it creates and magnifies—powerfully *fractures* perspectives that view the United States as exceptional or monolithic. The news site *The Independent*, for example, published an article which labeled Katrina as "the storm that shamed America," highlighting the many observations made about how New Orleans "looked like another world" or "went from developed world to third world" in the span of just a few days (Cornwell).[21]

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[20] Some examples include HBO's television drama *Treme,* the film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* by Benh Zeitlin, and Spike Lee's documentary *When the Levees Broke*.

[21] Observations like these are marked by ambivalence: on the one hand, they acknowledge the existence of other geo-political spaces and thus push against superpower parochialism;

Furthermore, much post-disaster discussion of Katrina has centered on how structural inequality and the violent inheritances of slavery/colonialism in New Orleans (an observation which creates a continuum between Hurricane Katrina and the transatlantic slave-trade) contributed to delays in governmental response and also left certain populations exposed to the hurricane and its toxic aftermath. Observations such as these qualify Nixon's claim about the United States, emphasizing instead the climatic continuities that Ghosh points toward and which this project is interested in further meditating upon. Through the eyes of Katrina, therefore, we begin to glimpse the necessity and potentiality of a South-South comparative axis, one which understands the importance of building a productive dialogue between spaces that previously have been perceived as mutually unintelligible.[22]

Such a perspective, moreover, is supported by the critical work of scholars like Jennifer Greeson, who theorize the significance of the U.S. South within a global framework. In her book *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature*, that:

> [O]ur South appears in U.S. literature to embody *both sides of the disavowed binary*: simultaneously colonial and colonized, it diverges from the nation writ large on the basis of its exploitativeness—as the location of the internal colonization of Africans and African Americans in the United States—and on the basis of its exploitation—as the location of systemic underdevelopment, military defeat, and occupation. (3, emphasis mine.)

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but, on the other hand, such claims clearly indicate that many people envisage the "third world" as solely a site of disaster and disarray.

[22] This framework thus contributes to the project of "eco-cosmopolitanism," which speaks to the "means individuals and groups in specific cultural contexts have succeeded in envisioning themselves in similarly concrete fashion as part of the global biosphere, or by what means they might be enabled to do so" (Heise 62). Rather than draw the conclusion that all places are connected (one of the great clichés of contemporary environmental studies), a South-South axis is attentive to the political and ecological imaginaries that enable communities to recognize themselves as part of a global (yet uneven) dilemma, while foregrounding the power struggles that such visions might be inclined to hide, legitimate, or reinvigorate.

Throughout this book, Greeson develops an account of the South as an internal "other" for the U.S., enabling its social, economic, and cultural contours to develop and formalize as they have. This condition depends on seeing the U.S. South as lying simultaneously inside and outside the national imaginary, especially as it is constructed in American literature and other modes of cultural production. From this perspective, the U.S. South thus functions as "an unparalleled site of connection between 'the United States' and what lies outside it—*a connection to the larger world*, to Western history, to a guilty colonial past and a desired and feared imperial future" (3, emphasis mine). Therefore, while it is important to acknowledge the ways in which America's settler-colonial history and its continued regimes of neo-imperial and capitalist violence have *profoundly* contributed to environmental degradation on a disproportionate scale (often in the name of development and economic freedom), it is also vital to keep in mind how certain Southern dynamics (which locate the U.S. South in a liminal space, hovering between colonizer and colonized, developed and developing, modern and pre-modern) are still powerfully at play today.[23]

Scholars from the global South, have underscored a related connection, emphasizing the surprising ties between the global South and the global North. In their thought-provoking article, "Theory from the South: Or, how Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa," Jean and John Comaroff examine recent instances of increasing financial collapse, state privatization, corruption, and ethnic conflict in the nation-states of the global North,

[23] Robert Bullard, the so-called "Father of Environmental Justice," has claimed that environmental issues are most prevalent in the U.S. South because of the region's colonial history: "the Southern United States is rapidly becoming the dumping ground for household garbage and hazardous waste. Historically, the South has scored at or near the bottom on almost all indicators of well-being, such as education, income, economic development, environmental quality, and health care. The region has a long history of exploiting land and people, especially African-Americans, dating back to times of slavery. There is a clear link between the region's ecological policies and race relations (25).

suggesting that it seems as though they are "evolving southward" in certain respects. With this in mind, they draw upon their research in Africa to argue that the global South thus might be seen as a source of theory and explanation for world historical events that have been spawned by global capitalism (113). As they put it: "contrary to the received Euromodernist narrative of the past two centuries—which has the so-called Global South tracking behind the curve of Universal History, always in deficit, always playing catch up—there is good reason to think the opposite: that, in the here-and-now, it is regions in the South that tend first to feel the concrete effects of *world-historical processes* as they play themselves out, thus to prefigure the future of the former metropole" (121, emphasis mine)

While the Comaroffs do not address climate change within this article, we can nevertheless understand global warming as one of the historical processes that capitalism has given way to. According to Jason Moore, after all, we are "living in the Capitalocene, the historical era shaped by relations privileging the endless accumulation of capital." Read in this light, the following claim made by the Comaroffs takes on new significance: "the Global South is producing and exporting some *ingenious modes of survival*—and more. It is often those adversely affected by modernity who recommission its means most effectively and most radically, thus also to bring to light long suppressed elements of its intrinsic nature" (126, emphasis mine).[24] By attending to the ways in which those most "adversely affected" by climate change (those living in the peripheral modernities of the global South) articulate their own notions of personhood, history, environmental knowledge, and world-making, we

[24] This observations is echoed by Greeson's observation: "As writers posit the South as premodern and undeveloped, though, it comes to serve *a forward-looking function* as well, emerging as a domestic site upon which the racialist, civilizing power of U.S. continental expansion and empire abroad may be rehearsed and projected" (4, emphasis mine).

might learn and discover new modes of "staying with the trouble" in the Anthropocene (Haraway).

Ultimately, then, this framework channels the theoretical ethos of literary scholar and theorist Homi Bhabha, who insists we move the project of theoretical construction and imaginative creation to an "ex-centric site," in order "to capture the restless, re-visionary energy that comes from the vast reaches of the planetary population whose genealogies do not reach back directly into the European Enlightenment" (6). In doing so, my approach accords with the critical energies of much postcolonial, decolonial, and indigenous scholarship and aesthetic production, which attempt to disrupt the Western telos of modernity and the histories it presumes.[25] By thinking about the capacities of a South-South approach, I hope to "provincialize" certain strands of environmentalist thought, unsettle climatological prognostications which spell doom for the South, and explore the ways that writers from the U.S. South and global South understand, respond to, construct, and negotiate the ex-centric climatological conditions that shape their world(s) today.[26]

Chapter Summaries

Below, I provide an outline for a few of the "iconic symbols" of the Anthropocene (hurricane, drought, extinction) that my dissertation will focus on, and I examine the ways in

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[25] Throughout the project, I will be switching between using postcolonial and decolonial, depending on context. I use decolonial because of the way in which it indexes a specific tradition of Latin American intellectuals who theorize from a space, intellectual tradition, and colonial history that is distinct from postcolonial scholarship (though there is of course some overlap in their work). Furthermore, the open (potentially indistinct) qualities of the term decolonial also enable me to bring in and engage with anti-imperial American literature in a way that the term postcolonial does not.

[26] My term "ex-centric climate"—through its sonic similarity to eccentric— gestures toward the uncanny and "weird" qualities of the Anthropocene. Numerous critics, chief among them Timothy Morton, have discussed how the "ecological awareness" ushered in by the Anthropocene is tinged by an everyday weirdness of a world transformed by climate change, a world which nudges us to acknowledge our interdependence with other beings.

which narrative form can "infuse those symbols with dramatic urgency" (Nixon 11). As mentioned earlier in this introduction, these narratives take place across a broad range of geographies: in my first chapter, I track literary representations of hurricanes as they manifest in the U.S. Gulf Coast (Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*) and on the Caribbean island of Trinidad (Monique Roffey's *Archipelago*); my second chapter examines the experience of drought in the U.S. Southwest (Paulo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife*) and in Australia's Northern Territory (*The Swan Book* by Alexis Wright); and my third chapter follows accounts of species extinction as they appear in the U.S. Everglades (*Power* by Linda Hogan) and South Africa (Henrietta Rose-Innes's *Green Lion*).[27] I conclude with a coda on survival in the face of climate collapse (Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*). By engaging with these globe-spanning manifestations of climatic change, and their corresponding aesthetic representations, I hope to contribute to environmental studies by calling attention to the unique, though interconnected, strategies of anti-imperial resistance and survival that voices across the South make available in the midst of extreme environmental upheaval.[28]

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[27] This organizational structure, which begins with a more punctual form of abnatural disaster and then transitions to more gradual forms of abnatural disaster, also allows me to explore how fast and slow forms of violence are entangled and co-existent rather than mutually exclusive.

[28] Moreover, through its south-south axis, my project advances a fresh mode of comparative work. This approach resonates with Fredric Jameson claim for a comparative approach that "involves comparison, not of the individual texts, which are formally and culturally very different from each other, but of the concrete situations from which such texts spring and to which they constitute distinct responses" (86). This comparative approach also forces us to question the definitional limits of what constitutes the global and regional South. Each of the southscapes I examine in this dissertation troubles a traditional rendering of these two geopolitical spaces: Is South Africa, for instance, as "southern" as other African nations? Can we include Aboriginal territory in Australia in the global South? How do such spaces compare to Indigenous land in the United States? By reading through a mix of traditional and non-traditional southscapes, this project prods at conventional and normative discourse around the categories of the global South and regional South.

In my first chapter, on hurricanes, I pair Jesmyn Ward's 2011 novel *Salvage the Bones* (which takes place in the U.S. Gulf Coast) with Monique Roffey's 2013 novel *Archipelago* (which takes place across the Caribbean). These texts deal with different aspects of disaster's temporarily, urging us to reconsider the demarcated boundaries commonly associated with the wreckage caused by hurricanes. Ward's novel, I suggest, draws out the historical dynamics that contributed to Katrina's destructive force. In examining the intersection of colonialism, racism, and meteorology in the U.S. South, Ward's text offers a critique of weather forecasting as a racialized discourse that generates atmospheres (both cultural and material) of anti-blackness across the South Atlantic. Roffey's novel, on the other hand, extends the temporality of hurricanes in the opposite direction: for the characters in *Archipelago*, the violence of a hurricane flows beyond the apparent endpoint of disaster. My analysis examines the melancholic affects and material ripples that extend the life of hurricane violence in the Caribbean, and examines how Roffey's text proposes recuperative pathways that diverge from end-stopped notions of recovery. By reformulating the timescales of disaster, Ward and Roffey model the need for a more nuanced approach to the complexities of climate disaster.

Turning toward the climatological category of drought, my second chapter examines *The Water Knife* by Paulo Bacigalupi (set in the American Southwest) and *The Swan Book* by Alexis Wright (set in Australia's Northern Territory). Building on Jed Esty's work in *Unseasonable Youth*, I read these two novels as desiccated *bildungsromane* in order to explore how they dramatize a breakdown of subjective temporality whose roots lie not only in the disrupted temporalities of global capitalism, but in the climatological crisis precipitated by global capitalism and colonial violence. My reading focuses on the adolescent figure of the climate refugee, who acts as a potent symbol for exploring the slow, eco-systemic violence of

drought alongside the more intimate precarities of life in the everyday Anthropocene. *The Water Knife*, I argue, portrays the climate refugee as a figure of "barren life"—a term that emphasizes and elucidates the climatological dimensions of sovereign and necropolitical violence in a parched landscape. I argue that *The Swan Book*, contrastingly, subverts this forced proximity with the drought-stricken land, illustrating how geologic intimacy can provide a sense of unexpected sociality and insurgent belonging. Together, these texts push, test, and overturn the boundaries of what it means for the human species to be a "geological agent" in the Anthropocene.

Moving away from an examination of the intensified weather patterns wrought by global warming, my final chapter turns toward the topic of mass species extinction. This chapter examines Linda Hogan's *Power* (set in the Everglades) and Henrietta Rose-Innes's *Green Lion* (set in Cape Town). Both novels begin with, and thus foreground, the slaughter of an endangered feline, enacting what I call a trophic cascade plotting. This plot arrangement orients readers to the vast webs of life that are impacted by the loss of a keystone species. In my analysis, *Power* depicts the execution of a Florida panther (a sacred animal, or "earth-being,") to jumpstart reflections on whether extinction signifies the end of a life-form or the end of a form of living. Picking up on this question, Rose-Innes's *The Green Lion* portrays the death of another feline (the Cape lion) to imagine how the radial repercussions of loss can encourage us to imagine new, unexpected modes of ecological conservation. These novels thus alter the structure of the trophic cascade by adding humankind, culture, and even climate to the affected ecosystem. From this perspective, species extinction not only stems from climate change, but ultimately loops back into its destructive pattern. Acknowledging this pattern, however, also enables us to potentially mitigate it.

Through a reading of Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*, my coda on survival (registered through the affect of hope) reflects on why we must continue to conceptualize reading and writing as vital practices for the actualization of futures characterized by climate justice. Erdrich's novel tells the story of a woman who discovers she is pregnant in the midst of a slowly-unfolding climate disaster—one which causes species evolution to move backwards in (or sporadically across) time, rendering "healthy" human reproduction a complete anomaly. Despite these dire circumstances, the novel's protagonist continues to write letters to her unborn (potentially non-human) child. The novel thus dramatizes—and formally enacts—the value of writing, storytelling, and narrative continuance even in the face of profoundly uncertain climate futures. It frames writing, in other words, as central to a practice of radical hope—a hope that "endures," and insists on the importance of recognizing that not all is already given or determined and that struggles for life are still of paramount importance.

Chapter One

Weathering the Superstorm in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* and Monique Roffey's *Archipelago*

> He had never seen such strange weather; the surprise
> of a tempestuous January that churned
> the foreshore brown with remarkable, bursting seas
> convinced him that "somewhere people interfering
> with the course of nature"; the feathery mare's tails
> were more threateningly frequent, and its sunsets
> the roaring ovens of the hurricane season,
> while the frigates hung closer inland and the nets
> starved on their bamboo poles. The rain lost its reason
> and behaved with no sense at all. What had angered
> the rain and made the sea foam?
>
> ~Derek Walkcott, *Omeros* (299-300)

Introduction: The Poetics of a Hurricane

In his 1984 lecture on the interplay of language and identity in anglophone Caribbean poetry, the celebrated Barbadian writer Kamau Brathwaite described the need for Caribbean writers to reforge the English language in ways that "approximate … the natural experience, the environmental experience" of the West Indies (10). While writers from the region may have inherited a poetic language that enables them to "describe the imported alien experience of the snowfall," many Caribbean writers, according to Brathwaite, had yet to uncover a language that enables them to "describe the hurricane," which is "our own experience" (8). Taking the hurricane as the paramount example of a uniquely Caribbean eco-experience, Brathwaite explains that "the hurricane does not roar in pentameters"—it is a phenomenon that radically overflows the linguistic and poetic affordances of standard

English (10).[29] Brathwaite's observation points to a complex relationship between poetics and mimesis, particularly within the Caribbean context, yet it also encourages us to critically reflect on a number of related concerns that more recently have been discussed within the context of anthropogenic climate change: What forms (in addition to poetry) might be used to represent the experience of hurricanes and other environmental disasters? How do hurricanes, in particular, fit within or disrupt representational paradigms and conventions? And how does geographical situatedness inflect one's understanding of and relationship to ecological disaster?[30]

A growing corpus of hurricane media speaks to a steady interest in the representational questions I have, via Brathwaite, catalogued above. This growth is no doubt due (at least in part) to the increased frequency of superstorms—in the Atlantic, but also beyond—as a result of anthropogenic climate change.[31] The 2004 film, *The Day After Tomorrow*, for example, depicts a world in which the melting of the polar ice caps has disrupted the circulation of the North Atlantic ocean and its currents, leading to a massive superstorm that develops in the Northern Hemisphere. While the film initially points to the importance of situating an understanding of anthropogenic climate change within a framework of deep time (one of the film's protagonists is a paleoclimatologist, drilling for ice-core samples in the Larsen Ice Shelf), the film tosses such concerns aside in order to

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[29] In his well-known theory of "nation language," he emphasizes the use of dactyls, intonation, and Afro-Caribbean rhythms that offer an "alter/native" to the pentameter, a poetic form that is tied to the weather, landscape, and cultural rhythms of northern Europe (Brathwaite 4). For more on this topic, refer to his text, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*.

[30] For scholarship interested in the relationship between the imagination and climate change, see: Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* and Ursula Heise's *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*.

[31] According to the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, climate change, driven by human activity, is creating more favorable conditions for stronger hurricanes, with recent research finding that storms are intensifying more rapidly than they were 30 years ago.

foreground shocking images of sensational and swift urban destruction. In one of the film's more notorious scenes, a colossal wall of water strikes New York City, washing over a vulnerable-looking Statue of Liberty before eventually descending upon and flooding the rest of Manhattan. As is common with many films depicting environmental catastrophe, *The Day After Tomorrow* indulges in what Andrew Ross describes as "Hollywoodish imagination," which is "dominated by the blockbuster spectacle of some future, definitive event that triggers a system collapse" (23).[32] Such films tend to dramatize disasters (such as hurricanes) as strictly spectacular, punctual, and eye-catching events; this framing of disaster, in turn, can often lead to a sense of "domestication within crisis," which entails an implicit acquiescence to the environmental status quo, and a potentially troubling normalization of crisis (Buell 205).[33]

Several critics have examined the shortcomings inherent in these representational approaches by drawing attention to the importance of acknowledging the varied temporal rhythms of ecological violence.[34] In an interview conducted shortly after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, Brathwaite similarly points to the importance of understanding the multi-scalar dimensions of environmental catastrophe. He explains:

> My position on catastrophe … is, I'm so conscious of the enormity of slavery and the Middle Passage and I see that as an ongoing catastrophe. So whatever happens in the world after that, like tsunamis in the Far East and India and Indonesia, and 9/11, and now New Orleans, to me these are all aspects of that same original explosion, which I constantly try to understand. (McSweeney 2005)

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[32] To this list we could add the films *2012* (2009) directed by Roland Emmerich and *Geostorm* (2017) directed by Dean Devlin.

[33] Nicole Fleetwood describes how the disaster of Hurricane Katrina revealed the presence of "weather citizens": spectators of catastrophe who watched "the Katrina event" unfold from a safe distance (787).

[34] See Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor.*

For Brathwaite, contemporary disaster—such as tsunamis, terrorist strikes, and hurricanes—must be accurately framed within a longer history of colonial violence and racialized capitalism. They are, in other words, contemporary manifestations of an endlessly unfurling catastrophe that appears located in a distant and disconnected past. Such a perspective resonates with Laura Ann Stoler's historicized vision of imperial formations, which also involves "[m]aking connections where they are hard to trace" between psychological suffering and physical destruction of landscapes, homes, and infrastructure (195). In making and maintaining these connections across space and time, Brathwaite highlights the dialectic between destructive processes (racialized violence and its continuance) and disastrous events (Hurricane Katrina) or, as disaster specialist Ilan Kelman puts it, the "fuzzy clusters" of experiences that elide "[c]atastrophic and chronic disasters" in global societies (118).

Within this emerging canon of what we might call hurricane fiction, there are also a number of writers and artists invested in carefully teasing out the oft-overlooked and increasingly complex temporal dimensions of hurricanes.[35] Novels such as Ben Lerner's genre-bending *10:04* model a perspective that foregrounds the continuities between punctual disasters and larger, longer systems of human and environmental exploitation. His novel begins with the arrival of Hurricane Irene and ends with the arrival of Hurricane Sandy; in between, he meditates upon a range of disparate subjects: shopping at Whole Foods, the origins of his career as a writer, and his past relationships. In a review of Lerner's book, Benjamin Kunkel argues that *10:04* proves "the rule that the contemporary experience of climate change has so far eluded the grasp of literature. Lerner can write a novel, set in the present, that deals with the subject head-on, but only by becoming essayistic, journalistic (the

[35] See, for example, *Hurricane* by Caribbean writer Andrew Salkey and *10:04* by American writer Ben Lerner.

narrator is aggregating news stories in his head; he is neither evacuating a hospital nor being evacuated himself), and, even then, only amid the heaviest weather yet visited on New York City this century."[36] Yet we can also read Lerner's decision to frame his novel with two superstorms as a formal strategy that emphasizes how our daily, quotidian actions must be read as co-existing alongside—and indeed contributing to—extreme weather events. By *not* dwelling upon a spectacularized depiction of the hurricane's arrival, Lerner instead emphasizes how the presence of hurricanes in New York is part of a larger narrative web, one that is tied to deep histories of immigration and racism, as well as the more contemporary issues of gentrification and the excess of Wall Street—all issues touched upon throughout the course of his novel. The strength of a Lerner's perspective, then, lies in its refusal to represent hurricanes as singular, spectacular events—a strategy that overlooks the multi-scalar complexity of hurricanes in the Anthropocene.

This chapter focuses on two novels that excel at depicting—and expanding upon—the scalar complexities elucidated above: Jesmyn Ward's 2011 novel *Salvage the Bones* (which takes places in the U.S. Gulf Coast) and Monique Roffey's 2013 novel *Archipelago* (which takes place across the Caribbean). Both of these novels deal with families whose lives have been violently disrupted by the South Atlantic's increasingly tempestuous weather patterns. In this chapter, I argue that a focus on the representational approaches used to depict these hurricanic disruptions urge one to reconsider the temporal parameters commonly associated with the wreckage caused by hurricanes. In the case of *Salvage the Bones*, my reading examines the novel's attention to the Gulf Coast's "aerial legacies." Rather than frame Katrina as a

[36] Lerner's text acknowledges his relative safety from the hurricane. Rather than obscure the reality of the hurricane, however, this observation heightens our awareness that climate-violence is unequally distributed within urban spaces.

singular, catastrophic event, Ward's novel explores the historical dynamics that contributed to its destructive meteorological force. Attending to the novel's aerial legacies, I show, enables a critique of weather forecasting and climate modeling as racialized discourses that generate atmospheres (that are both cultural and material in kind) of anti-blackness in the American South. Ward's novel, however, also gestures toward the possibilities that emerge from atmospheric entanglement; I argue that the polyscalar politics of breath and breathing can often lead to empowering strategies for resilience and kinship in the midst of anthropogenic climate change.

My reading of *Archipelago* picks up on this interest in temporality, examining it from a different (though complimentary) perspective. While Ward's novel emphasizes the anticipatory and historically rooted aspects of a hurricane, Roffey's novel, I argue, extends the temporality of hurricanes in the opposite direction: for the characters in *Archipelago*, the violence of a hurricane flows beyond the apparent end-point of disaster, following them on their sea-voyage across the Caribbean isles. My analysis of this novel examines the melancholic affects and material ripples that extend the life of hurricane violence in the Caribbean, arguing that the Anthropocene's emphasis on non-human/human entanglement complicates questions of object loss that result from disaster. While traditional theorizations of loss have tended to reproduce a human exceptionalism that has served to distinguish humankind from the rest of the world, this chapter explores some of the various ways that death and mourning can in fact entangle us in multispecies networks and vast, "weathered" webs of oceanic life.

Through formal innovation and narrative ingenuity, these texts foreground and examine different aspects of disaster's temporarily (in the registers of the pre- and the post-), urging us to reconsider and reformulate the timescales of disaster. Ward and Roffey can thus

be read as theorizing and representing specific experiences of disaster across varying terrains of inequality and eco-susceptibility. And in doing so, they not only destabilize traditional conceptions of how we categorize disaster, but they also create space for "the plight and stories of distinctly more vulnerable members of society," generating a discourse that speaks "of missing persons or unheard voices; of 'hidden damage' and 'shadow risks' and, more severely, of 'silent' or 'quiet violence'" (Hewitt 120). Attending to these marginalized voices and perspectives is absolutely necessary for cultivating an anticolonial approach to disaster studies, and for imagining a framework that enables one to productively dwell in the complex space-time of abnatural disaster.[37]

—Part I—

Aerial Legacies, Stormy Prognostications: Reading the Weather in *Salvage the Bones*

Jesmyn Ward published *Salvage the Bones* in 2011, following Hurricane Katrina's destructive sweep through the Gulf Coast in 2005. Written as a response to "the people who blamed survivors for staying and for choosing to return to the Mississippi Gulf Coast after the storm," Ward's novel tells the story of an impoverished African American family who have resided for generations in a run-down woodland clearing (nicknamed "the Pit"), which is located in the fictional town of Bois Sauvage, Mississippi (Ward 263). The story is narrated in the first-person by Esch Batiste, a tough and precocious fifteen-year-old, who learns she is pregnant at the novel's outset. The narrative slowly unfolds across the eleven days preceding

[37] As I discuss in my introduction, this term, (inspired by the work of Jesse Oak Taylor), draws upon the etymological versatility of the prefix ab- which "means both away from and derived from" and thus speaks to "both nature's absence [and] its uncanny persistence … it characterizes those moments in which nature appears other to itself, beside or outside itself" (5). Thinking about disaster as abnatural, therefore, engenders a perspective that understands climate change disasters as dynamic, interactive phenomena, co-created by systems of weather and human subjects.

Katrina's calamitous arrival. And in these eleven days, we follow Esch as she comes to terms with her unexpected pregnancy, as she deals with the grief that accompanies the traumatic loss of her mother, and as she goes on several (mis)adventures with her brothers in the untamed forest that surrounds their home.

For a novel so centered on the arrival of hurricane Katrina, there has been a surprising lack of critical attention to the role of weather, atmosphere, and meteorology in *Salvage the Bones*. Rather, critical examination of Ward's novel has tended to draw on posthumanist and animal studies frameworks—critical frameworks that stress the material entanglements and the unexpected intimacies found within the novel's Southern terrain. In her essay "Sex After the Black Normal," for example, Erica Edwards argues that "*Bones*'s evisceration of the distinction between human and non-human life opens its ethic of subsistence and sustenance, [situating it] in a parallel relationship to the biopolitical operations of the state" (157). And Rick Crownshaw contributes to this interest in the book's depiction of the non-human by observing that "in Ward's South, subjectivity is to be found forever breaking its bounds, oscillating between the world of subjects and objects, environmentally dispersed, or more accurately put, ecologically constituted" (Crownshaw 161). According to Crownshaw, Ward's depiction of an ecological subjectivity situates her novel "in a larger network of southern representation" based on "the figures of waste, trash and dirt" (162). Writing from an animal studies perspective, Christopher Lloyd further examines "the overlaps, relations, and connections between humans and animals to see what kind of creaturely, throwaway, and precarious life is represented in the contemporary South" (251). Critical work in this vein has been essential for unpacking the "corporeal legacies" activated and perpetuated by Hurricane Katrina. This term, introduced by Lloyd in his essay,

indexes the growing collection of work examining "displaced or disposable *bodies* after Katrina" (247, emphasis mine).

Despite (or perhaps because of) this criticism in the new materialist vein, scant attention has been given to the aerial legacies—the histories of weather and hurricane activity that speak to and inflect current race-relations in the U.S. South—within Ward's novel. This is related, perhaps, to the amorphous, invisible, and supple qualities of air; for as Steve Mentz puts it, "air looks like nothing" and thus "provides a less celebrated image of the fragile connection between human bodies and the nonhuman environment" (39, 40). In the context of the Anthropocene, however, it has become increasingly clear that air (and atmosphere) can no longer be understood as spaces of nothingness and ahistoricity, or as synonymous with an immutable outside. Instead, critical discourse around the Anthropocene urges one to understand air as an expansive interior, a space of continuity and accumulation, and a "heavy" substance freighted with (often violent) history and ideology.[38] Moreover, as Tobias Menely observes, air is a key site for locating a definitive feature of the Anthropocene: "the amplifying feedback loops between surplus value and the surplus energy derived from fossil fuels" (94).[39] The analytical oversight of air's role in the novel, then, is surprising not only considering literary criticism's traditional interest in atmosphere as a symbolically charged and metaphorically supple formal apparatus, but also because air itself

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[38] In describing the air as "heavy," I'm building off the work of Elizabeth DeLoughrey, who examines the "heavy waters" of modernity in the Atlantic. DeLoughrey's analysis argues that the Atlantic's waters are heavy due to accumulated histories of colonial violence and because of ecological ruination (from waste disposal, nuclear testing, etc.).

[39] While Menely's essay does not explicitly address the ways in which histories of race and colonialism are imbricated in the relentless expansion of capitalist production, where all that is solid (quite literally) melts into air, the historical materialism that he calls for surely recognizes such issues as central to its critical impulse. His work, moreover, is certainly indebted to Karl Marx's *Dispatches for the New York Tribune*, which frames capitalism as a necessarily global and colonial system.

has become a potent—and toxic—index of western modernity and its march toward "progress." In attending to the aerial legacies of the U.S. Gulf Coast, then, we gain insight into the historical variables at play in the arrival of Hurricane Katrina.

Ward's narrative, from its early moments, certainly encourages a reading that acknowledges the weather's impact on the narrative's denouement, especially when it functions as a vehicle for relaying histories of slavery and colonialism. As the novel opens, Esch reflects on the annual appearances of hurricanes in the Gulf Coast; she remarks:

> It's summer, and when it's summer, there's always a hurricane coming or leaving here. Each pushes its way through the flat Gulf to the twenty-six mile manmade Mississippi beach, where they knock against the old summer mansions with their slave galleys turned guest mansions before running over the bayou, through the pines, to lose wind, drip rain, and die in the north. … We ain't had one come straight for us in years, time enough to forget how many jugs of water we need to fill, how many cans of sardines and potted meat we should stock, how many tubs of water we need. But on the radio that Daddy keeps playing in his parked truck, I heard them talking about it earlier today. How the forecasters said the tenth tropical depression had just dissipated in the Gulf but another one seems to be forming around Puerto Rico. (4)

In this passage, Esch emphasizes the significance of hurricanes for residents of the Gulf Coast by characterizing them as active, intrusive visitors who are "coming or leaving here" and who "push" and "knock against" the summer mansions located by the sea. Yet it is not just those who live in the Gulf's giant coastal mansions who are intimate with the destructive force of these storms; Esch's narration reminds us that historically (in the Gulf Coast, at least) it had been slaves and other marginalized communities who were most exposed to the violent weather conditions that accompany hurricanes. Examining the evolution of the coast's development across U.S. history, Craig Colten observes that "since Reconstruction, blacks have occupied the swampier lowlands of the Gulf Coast. [And] even more critically, Jim Crow–era housing segregation in Mississippi and Louisiana led to blacks, poor whites, and immigrants occupying the bottom of 'the bowl' and other flood-prone areas" (106).

Despite attempts at converting this area into a more hospitable environment (through the development of a "twenty-six mile manmade beach," for example), violent exposure to the region's tempestuous weather has, as Ward's passage makes clear, carried over into the contemporary living conditions of the Gulf Coast.[40] And unfortunately for Esch and her family, this exposure will only become more threatening as hurricane frequency increases—a reality the passage emphasizes through Esch's observation that there have already been ten "tropical depressions" in the Gulf during the year in which the novel is set.

The relationship between meteorology and legacies of Southern racism is more deeply explored in a subsequent scene in which Esch, her father, and her friends discuss whether or not to trust weather-reports predicting Katrina's arrival. Through this interaction, Ward unpacks how the intersection of weather forecasting and colonial history plays out across contemporary race-relations in the U.S. South:

> 'If anything hit us this summer, it's going to blow down a few branches. News don't know what they talking about. … Everytime somebody in Bois Sauvage get arrested, they always get the story wrong.'
> 'That journalists. Weatherman's a *scientist*,' Randall said.
> 'He ain't shit.'
> …
> 'This year's different,' Daddy said as he sat on the back of his trunk. For a moment he looked not-drunk. 'News is right: every week it's a new storm. Ain't never been this bad' … 'Makes my bones hurt,' Daddy said. 'I can feel them coming.' (6)

While the previous passage foregrounds Esch's and her community's knowledge of hurricane history in the Gulf Coast, this debate stages the ways in which the systems used to disseminate weather and climate information can be largely ineffective, especially when they

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[40] It is precisely *because of* these developmental schemes that certain populations are so vulnerable. Feminist scholar Nancy Tuana examines this issue in her essay, "Viscous Porosity," which names that fact that "without the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, which has been building levees along the Mississippi River for two centuries, neither New Orleans nor the Mississippi would be what they are today" (195).

fail to take into account the racialized social histories that surround and saturate them. This is emphasized, in particular, through the character of Manny, who conflates journalists and weathermen, a mix-up which illuminates a troubling relationship between reports on police-brutality (a social atmosphere of anti-blackness) and reports on climatological risk (a meteorological atmosphere of anti-blackness). Despite Randall's protestation that Manny differentiate between the "weatherman" (a "scientist" who is commonly framed as separate or dissociated from the social sphere) and the "journalists" (who are imbricated in the social and thus influenced by institutional racism), what matters most to the characters in this context, as this passage illustrates, is that both of these figures are associated with, and operate through, the discriminatory logics of the state—a structure of power that "always get[s] the story wrong," relentlessly producing an ontological negation of black life and a fetishization of black death.[41] As a result of this fraught relationship with state-operated technologies, Ward's novel demonstrates, certain communities are left in positions of radical precarity and vulnerability.[42] Or, to put it differently, the very material and infrastructural technologies that are developed to mitigate danger (such as weather forecasting systems) end up maintaining and overlooking certain social imbalances.

In its attention to these larger social dynamics, Ward's novel also articulates a critique of weather forecasting as a discourse of illusory meteorological control. Marita Sturken discusses this issue in her analysis of "weather media events," which argues that "weather

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[41] As numerous articles have examined, a (white) American tendency for fetishizing Black death did indeed materialize in Katrina's aftermath. The flood of documents ("images of suffering, emoting, and abandoned black bodies in the floodwaters") surrounding Katrina illustrates a voyeuristic social position characterized by an attitude of "consumerism [combined] with spectatorship and technological fetishism" (Fleetwood 772).

[42] Following Nicole Fleetwood, I understand technology as "a media process of production and as a discursive tool by which particular narratives are naturalized and certain bodies made vulnerable" (768).

prediction is in fact a very limited kind of knowledge that promises protection and reassurance yet which bears no relationship to the social infrastructures that would ensure preparedness. Indeed, it could be argued that prediction not only has little impact on people's daily lives but serves to screen out the politics of disaster" (2005). Taking Sturken's argument further, one could say that prediction becomes an instrument of neocolonial operations by effacing "the politics of disaster" and assigning responsibility for protection to individual consumption.[43] Ward's passage thus pushes back against narratives that "blame survivors for staying" by highlighting how larger social histories, structural dynamics, and racial politics complicate one's orientation toward climate science and the technologies of weather forecasting. These discourses and technologies, no matter their accuracy in reading meteorological futures, cannot be simply positioned as ahistorical and objective phenomena. Rather, they are situated within a broader political geography of race and racism in the U.S. and must therefore acknowledge the ways that scientific knowledge is troubled by racial and social barriers.

A key factor, then, for understanding the efficacy of weather forecasting is to consider its relationship with power and its position within hierarchies of culture. And, as Geographer Mike Hulme proposes, it is particularly important to recognize the way that power articulates with meteorological discourse because of a recent tendency in climatological science toward "climate reductionism"—a neologism for a contemporary twist on climate determinism. The idea behind climate reductionism, Hulme explains, is that

[43] This perspective resonates with common critiques of neoliberalism, which track how neoliberal frameworks "migrate responsibility to the individual scale and detracts attention from broader structural constraints and repressive structures" (Herman 18). In many cases, for example, evacuation required vehicle accessibility and being able to afford hotels or other forms of temporary housing.

> in seeking to predict a climate-shaped future, proponents of this logic reduce the complexity of interactions between climates, environments, and societies, and a new variant of climate determinism emerges … [it is] a form of analysis and prediction in which climate is first extracted from the matrix of interdependencies that shape human life within the physical world. Once isolated, climate is then elevated to the role of dominant predictor variable. (247)

Consequently, the hegemony exerted by the predictive natural sciences (which situate climate as the "dominant predictor variable") overshadows human attempts to understand the constantly unfolding future. For Hulme and others, this hegemony is manifested in the pivotal role held by climate (and related) modeling in influencing climate-change discourses. As a result of the epistemological authority over the future claimed, either implicitly or explicitly, by such modeling activities, climate becomes the one "known" factor in an otherwise unpredictable future.[44] The contingency, variability, and multiple possibilities of the future are erased as these predicted computational climates impose their sway over everything from future visions of the environment(s), economic activity, and social mobility to human behavior, cultural adaptation, and geosecurity.[45]

This is an especially troubling tendency within the context of the U.S. South, where discourses on climate determinism were historically used to justify the allegedly racially neutral (but actually rooted in racially discriminatory forms of scientific theory and practice) classification and hierarchization of different racial groups. This weaponization of climate, as a concept, argued that certain aspects of a region's climate exerted a powerful shaping

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[44] Hulme elaborates on this idea by explaining: "It is climate reductionism exercised through what I call 'epistemological slippage'—a transfer of predictive authority from one domain of knowledge to another without appropriate theoretical or analytical justification" (Hulme 249).

[45] Hulme's work resonates with Nicole Fleetwood's work on "technological reductionism," which she defines as the belief in "technology as the central force behind progress and social development" (768). In her essay, "Failing Narratives, Initiating Technologies," Fleetwood examines the effects of technological reductionism in the face of Hurricane Katrina.

influence on the physiology and psychology of individuals and races, which in turn decisively shaped the culture, organization, and behavior of the society formed by those individuals and races. Race scientists and colonial administrators—such as Sir Harry Johnston—argued, for example, that tropical climates caused laziness and promiscuity, while the frequent variability in the weather of the middle latitudes led to more vigorous and driven work ethics.[46] The end result of this logic was the equation of whiteness with civilization, and the "belief that blackness was produced through climatic degeneration" (Rusert 9). For this reason, it is important to note how Ward's text seeks to check tendencies toward climate and meteorological reductionism by highlighting how different cultural positions are also capable of (and vital for) predicting, understanding, and communicating the vicissitudes of weather. In the case of Esch's father, it's his "bones" that communicate the increase in hurricane activity that has resulted from anthropogenic climate change. And from this perspective, Esch's father can be understood as functioning as an alternative climate model (or weather forecaster), one who is attuned to both longer histories of hurricane activity in the Gulf Coast *and* the living conditions and social histories of the local communities residing in Bois Sauvage. The point of this exchange therefore is not to deny the accuracy of science-based weather reports (in fact, Esch's dad's response to the debate between Manny and Randall is to conclude that "the news is right"), but to emphasize how it is "necessary to balance

[46] The history of race science is complex, particularly within in the 18th and 19th centuries. Over these two centuries, race science transformed from positing that climate powerfully determined race (GLL Buffon), to arguing that race was completely determinative (Robert Knox), to post-Darwinian evolutionary viewpoint that argued that race could now be seen as an evolutionary response to selection over hundreds or thousands of generations (thus partially restoring climate's role, albeit in an indirect way). For more on the topic of tropical climates and "civilization," see: David N. Livingstone's "Tropical climate and moral hygiene: the anatomy of a Victorian debate" and "Race, space and moral climatology."

reductionist pathways to knowing the future with other ways of envisioning the future" (Hulme 266).[47] [48]

Ward's novel not only urges us to consider different ways of forecasting the weather (ones that account for histories of racism and anti-blackness in the Southern United States), but it encourages us to reformulate our understanding of weather in a meteorological sense, extending it beyond its traditional definition. Weather is commonly understood as "the condition of the atmosphere (at a given place and time) with respect to heat or cold, quantity of sunshine, presence or absence of rain, hail, snow, thunder, fog, etc., violence or gentleness of the winds" (OED). It is, in other words, the instantaneous physical state of the atmosphere. In order to examine the role of weather in the novel—and to draw out Ward's reconceptualization of weather—my reading channels Jesse Oak Taylor's call for a methodology of atmospheric reading, in which:

> Foreground becomes background and background becomes foreground. Character development, once the central question of the novel, becomes merely a device helping to narrativize a set of atmospheric 'readings,' by which I mean that the text registers atmospheric effects in a manner akin to a meteorological instrument. Meanwhile, those trivial elements of setting, mood, tone, and form that appear designed to be overlooked because they are externalized by the plot come to constitute the true realm of inquiry. The work of the novel becomes not to account for individual subjects but to materialize the climates of history. (15)

An important outcome of atmospheric reading—and ecocritical work more generally—is countering the viewpoint that setting is by definition inert, a static backdrop for events to take place in, while the novel's human characters provide the plot's action. Instead, the

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[47] Variations of this idea can be found in Wendy Chun's article "On Hypo-Real Models or Global Climate Change: A Challenge for the Humanities" and Srinivas Aravamudan's "The Catachronism of Climate Change."

[48] For further commentary on the relationship between expertise, culture, and risk, see: Ulrich Beck's *Risk Society*, Andrew Ross's *Strange Weather: Culture, Science, and Technology in the Age of Limits,* and Jamie Pietruska's *Looking Forward: Prediction & Uncertainty in Modern America.*

atmosphere, the environment, and the weather demonstrate agency in their own right. A mode of atmospheric reading thus highlights one of the central issues for Anthropocene criticism: that bodies of various kinds influence the conditions of possibility in their vicinity. In turn, this expanded conception of weather not only communicates the entangled vibrancy of the Gulf Coast's ecology, but it renders visible the otherwise obscure historical dynamics at work in the context of ecosystemic violence.

From this perspective, we can reimagine the novel's setting ("the Pit") as central to Ward's reconceptualization of hurricane weather. Early in the novel, Esch reflects on the history and development of the Pit; she explains:

> It was Papa Joseph nicknamed it all the Pit, Papa Joseph who let the white men he work with dig for clay that they used to lay the foundation for houses, let them excavate the side of a hill in a clearing near the back of the property where he used to plant corn for feed. Papa Joseph let them take all the dirt they wanted until their digging had created a cliff over a dry lake in the backyard, and the small stream that had run around and down the hill had diverted and pooled into the dry lake, making it into a pond, and then Papa Joseph thought the earth would give under the water, that the pond would spread and gobble up the property and make it a swamp, so he stopped selling earth for money. (14)

Esch's history of the Pit firmly situates the Batiste family within a larger history of resource extraction, one of the central land-practices contributing to climatic change. Mining for clay was an especially prominent industry in Mississippi, which contains some of the most minerally rich land (for clay and gravel) in the continental United States.[49] And though this instance of mineral excavation occurs at a fairly restrained scale, the novel carefully depicts how even limited instances of environmental violence extend beyond their intended spatio-temporal boundaries, resulting in an atmosphere that is freighted with past ecological violence. The family's history of clay mining, for example, hangs in the hot, humid air each

[49] More information on this topic can be found through the *U.S. Geological Survey Minerals Yearbook*.

summer, coating Esch and her friends in a fine powder: "We spent the summer dusted in an orange color, and when we woke up every day of our month-long sleepover, the sheets would feel powdery like red clay" (22-3).[50] By saturating the atmosphere with the residual dust of clay extraction, Ward points to the ways in which past environmental injustices are never truly past—they re-emerge, unexpectedly, across time, rupturing notions of seamless progress and teleological advancement. And as the passage shows, the results of environmental degradation are predominantly borne not by those who spearhead operations to extract and accumulate wealth (or capital) from the land, but by those who are taken advantage of in order to keep up with the pace of "development" in a capitalist economic system. Esch and her friends, in other words, are haunted by the land's previous instances of environmental degradation—it is the atmospheric condition that configures life in Bois Sauvage.

This history of resource extraction returns in a more frightening form in the novel's penultimate chapter, "The Eleventh Day: Katrina." I will return to this issue in the following section ("Living and Breathing in the Hurricane's Wake"), but I introduce it here to examine how the novel once more connects a history of environmental degradation to its depiction of hurricane weather. When Katrina eventually arrives at the Batiste residence, Esch and her family take refuge in their house, yet they are forced to evacuate when water from the storm begins to overwhelm the pond and starts to flood the family's home (the pond, as I cite above, is fed by a diverted stream that was created when the "white men" began extracting

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[50] Arn Keeling and John Sandlos note that "Mineral exploitation is particularly suitable as a diagnostic of the Anthropocene for a variety of reasons, but most basically because of the radical temporal disjunction between the rates of formation of mineral resources (geological) and the rates of their exploitation and depletion (on the order of centuries or decades). If this new geological epoch is indeed characterized by human-induced change, it is well to reflect on the incredible rapidity of that change" (8).

clay from the earth). In this moment of danger, Esch describes that "there is a lake growing in the yard. It moves under the broken trees like a creeping animal, a wide-nosed snake. Its head disappears under the house where we stand, its tail wider and wider, like it has eaten something greater than itself, and that great tail stretches out behind it into the woods, toward the Pit. The wind ripples the water and it is coming for us" (227). In this passage, Ward depicts how Esch's existence is governed by and constituted through a lively materiality that both precedes and exceeds her own being. This foregrounding of local and enmeshed material relations resonates with and adds to the new materialist work of writers such as Jane Bennett, whose text *Vibrant Matter* argues for acknowledging that humans exist on a horizontal plane alongside matter traditionally considered inert, nonliving, and, thus, less important.[51] For Bennett, one of the reasons to "advocate the vitality of matter" is that "the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption" (83). In stark opposition to an "image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter," the water in this scene assumes a frightening vibrance, appearing as an ever-expanding snake with an inexhaustible appetite for consumption.

Reading this depiction of Hurricane Katrina in conjunction with the preceding passage (which details the Pit's history as a site of clay mining) showcases the novel's capacity for modeling the ecosocial feedback loops that make up the eccentric climatological conditions of the Anthropocene, yet which are often overlooked by scientific models of

[51] Stacy Alaimo defines the work of new materialism as follows: "New materialisms, insisting on the agency and significance of matter, maintain that even in the anthropocene, or, especially in the anthropocene, the substance of what was once called 'nature,' acts, interacts, and even intra-acts within, through, and around human bodies and practices" (1). See also the work of Astrida Neimanis, Karen Barad, and Rosi Braidotti.

climate change.[52] Foregrounding the ecosocial quality of climate emphasizes the way global warming comes together as a dense and dispersed network of forms and feedback loops "that range from carbon molecules to international summits, jet engines to investment portfolios, coal mines (or wind turbines) to metaphors" (Taylor 16). These two passages illustrate how, on a larger, institutional scale, Ward's depiction of the hurricane allows us to grasp the multi-scalar relations between the social, environmental, and economic factors that make up the Gulf's climate—factors that are literally but otherwise invisibly responsible for the hurricane's material composition. Rather than presenting the hurricane as an ecologically closed system, the novel dramatizes the confluence of a vibrant, entangled system, with all of its elements open to and affected by the others. And on a smaller, more intimate scale, this scene also illustrates narrative's capacity for modeling climate through its ability to blur distinctions between a human family and their local environment—both have been swept into and circulate within the novel's depiction of the hurricane, which appears as a vast, weathered assemblage.

It's important to note, however, that Ward's novel complicates and nuances an assemblage-based perspective by inserting categories of race and class into the "dense network of relations" that Bennet observes we are all enmeshed in. At various points in the novel, Esch explains how she is able to track the hurricane's approach by observing the wind's velocity, its influence on local flora, and through the presence or absence of non-

[52] In the introduction to this dissertation, I discuss my theorization of the novel as a climate model. With its ability to link monumental shifts in time and its capacity for traversing disparate spaces, the novel can convincingly simulate both the intimate details and general contours of our increasingly warming world. My work on this topic is inspired by the critical energies of Jesse Oak Taylor and Mike Hulme, who argues for the need to develop a wider array of climate models—ones based on "contingent, imaginative, and humanistic accounts of social life and visions of the future" (245).

human animal life in Bois Sauvage; these observations, the novel emphasizes, are all marked by her raced and classed subject position. Esch observes, for example, that "the battery-operated radio told us nothing practical, but the yard did: the trees bending until almost breaking, arcing like fish line, empty oil drums rattling across the yard, the water running in clear streams, carving canyons" (217). Esch notices the vibrancy of the meteorological world around her through the wind-swept oil drums and contorted trees that characterize the "wasted and wild" landscape of her family's property, not through the "battery-operated radio" that other social groups might rely upon. Esch's practice of reading the weather thus reminds us that new materialist perspectives greatly benefit from taking into account issues of race and class, for such categories powerfully impact our agency and potentiality within larger weathered assemblages. This call for an intersectional assemblage theory has been articulated by scholars such as Alexander Weheliye, who reminds us that differential placement within networks yields greater or lesser access to agency—and those differences in agency carry important consequences.[53] Yet it is also important to note how this passage illustrates the ways in which agency can itself be re-imagined and re-negotiated, for Esch's strategy of reading the weather as an assemblage enables her and her family to prepare for the hurricane in ways that extend beyond normalized tactics or policies, but which nevertheless insist on futurity and survival. If we understand the spaces most susceptible to hurricane damage as racialized spaces, then we must similarly envision them as key sites through which to explore alternative, more just worlds.[54]

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[53] *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. See also Mel Y. Chen's *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*.

[54] As Amitav Ghosh has discussed in the context of Hurricane Sandy, established safety-protocols have been delayed or considered unnecessary in the face of disasters of "such a high degree of improbability that [they] confound statistical weather-prediction models" (25). According to Ghosh, the natural and social sciences alone can only do so much: literature

For Esch and the members of her community, then, the weather extends beyond the "condition of the atmosphere (at a given time and place)," becoming instead part of a larger ecological meshwork that includes histories of resource extraction, the ongoing legacies of racism and structural inequality, and the diverse flora and fauna of Bois Sauvage. From this perspective, Ward's rearticulation of weather approaches Christina Sharpe's observation that "the weather is the totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and the climate is antiblack." While Sharpe's provocation that, in her text, the "weather is the total climate" might seem initially puzzling (wouldn't it be more accurate to say that the climate is the total weather, rather than the other way around?), her surprising usage of these two terms points toward the ways in which the smaller-scaled dynamics of the weather, heavy with an accumulation of instances of human interference, have started to approach a common understanding of the climate, with its much larger scales of time and place. The two terms, in order words, have begun to overlap to a certain extent—a phenomenon rendered starkly visible through the multi-scaled dynamics of abnatural disaster, as was seen through Hurricane Katrina. Importantly, however, Sharpe's text also notes that the "climate is antiblack." And for Sharpe, this observation is not a metaphor, but an account of how the environment is constituted through colonialism as an archive and vehicle of racial violence. Understanding the abnatural conditions of climate disaster thus requires that one not only grasp the unexpected entanglements of the planet's ecological systems, but that one also recognize how the environment is materially animated by the ongoing histories of colonialism.[55] The question we are left with, and which *Salvage the Bones* begins to confront in

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should offer a compelling pathway for bringing the realities of our climate-changed world to life.

[55] The (black) Anthropocene, in turn, registers how the grammars of meteorology, race, and class emerge in relation to one another and are co-produced (while still, in many ways,

its final pages, is how does one live in and inhabit the wake of climate disaster and its colonialist underpinnings?

Living and Breathing in the Hurricane's Wake

In her essay "Climate Change and the Struggle for Genre," Stephanie LeMenager reflects on the ways in which our everyday habits of living alongside the world have begun to crumble under the pressure of the "material impingements" of climate change (221). "The lived time of the Anthropocene," she explains, requires "paying attention to what it means to live, day by day, through climate shift and the economic and sociological injuries that underwrite it" (225). This section suggests that *Salvage the Bones* emphasizes one foundational and non-negotiable everyday practice for inhabiting the Anthropocene: breathing. While the role of breathing in Ward's novel has not yet received critical attention, it arises in the novel's final pages as an important locus through which to critique contemporary relations of power and imagine a better social and political world—a world that insists on the impulse for life and relationality in the presence of airy inequalities and environmental vulnerabilities. When access to air becomes jeopardized, breathing, Ward's text suggests, can powerfully encapsulate the ways that subjects are entangled with one another and with the wider world.

Breathing figures as a prevalent topic in Black Studies and African American literary traditions, where it reflects both concerns over experiences of oppression and the possibility for political affects and actions.[56] In his 1952 text *Black Skin, White Masks*, Franz Fanon

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structural and imposed). Kathryn Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* tackles this idea by examining the relationship between race and geology. Her text sets geology, Anthropocene discourse, and critical race theory in dialogue with one another to nuance who the "Anthropos" is in Anthropocene.

[56] See Ashon Crawley's study of breath and blackness, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (2016), Tony Medina's collection of poetry, *Committed to Breathing* (2003), or Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987).

utilized breathing to negotiate experiences of racialized subordination and to examine breathing's potential for realizing collective feelings and actions. In this work, he writes: "It is not because the Indo-Chinese has discovered a culture of his own that he is in revolt … it is because 'quite simply' it was, in more than one way, becoming impossible for him to breathe" (226-7). For Fanon, understanding the (in)ability to breathe is central to understanding the ways in which the black unconscious has been shaped under colonial domination and its geographies of mental and physical enslavement. Writing about the Manichean segregation of colonial space, Fanon argues: "the colonist's sector is a sector built to last, all stone and steel … [it is] a world with no space, people are piled up on top of each other, the shacks squeezed tightly together" (15). In the colonial environment Fanon describes, it is difficult for people of color to breathe due to a scarcity of "breathing room."[57]

More recently, this focus on breath and breathing has seen a resurgence in light of the murder of Eric Garner, an African American resident of Staten Island, who was put in a deadly chokehold by plainclothes officer Daniel Pantaleo on July 17, 2014. Garner's last words, which he repeated a staggering eleven times, were: "I can't breathe." Fanon's and Garner's insistence on the right and need to breathe have since become a rallying cry for a number of social-justice movements, many of which have utilized (lack of) breath as a powerful expression of the asphyxiating atmosphere that African Americans exist in today. Signs of protest used by activists in the Black Lives Matter movement, for example, have

[57] My focus above on Fanon underscores the relationship between respiration and colonial violence, but it's also important to note that his work is also informed by ecological issues (though this ecological dimension is often less explored).

combined and adapted Fanon's and Garner's words to articulate the fact that "for many reasons, [Black Americans] can no longer breathe."[58]

Salvage the Bones locates this interest in the politics of black breath within the corrosive conditions of the Anthropocene, examining how Hurricane Katrina, in particular, made the act of breathing difficult for those most exposed to its violence. When Katrina finally arrives at the Batiste residence, the hurricane's deluge soaks through the bottom floors of the house, forcing Esch and her family to relocate to the attic in an attempt to find refuge from the storm's rising waters. Yet the water, as I mentioned earlier in my analysis, has started to accumulate in the Pit, and it eventually overflows and floods the house, violently tearing it from its foundation. In an effort to avoid being washed away, the family climbs out of the attic (through a hole cut in the roof with a chainsaw) and desperately starts to scale a tree that will lead them to a neighboring home. Yet in this moment, Esch, carrying China's puppies, is swept into the swirling water, where she nearly drowns:

> The water swallows, and I scream. My head goes under and I am tasting it, fresh and cold and salt somehow, the way tears taste in the rain. I kick extra hard, like I am running a race, and my head bobs above the water but the hand of the hurricane pushes it down, down again. *Who will deliver me?* And the hurricane says *sssssssshhhhhhhh*. It shushes me through the water, with a voice muffled and deep, but then I feel a real hand, a human hand, cold and hard as barbed wire on my leg, pulling me back, and then I am being pushed up and out of the water … I cough and cough up the water and the hurricane and the pit and I can't stop and Skeetah is braced, looking out the ravaged roof calling China, watching her cut through the swirling water straight as a water moccasin into the whipping, fallen woods in the distance, and Junior is rocking back and forth, squatting on the balls of his feet, his hand over his eyes because he does not want to see anymore; he is wailing *NoNoNoNoNoNoNoNoNoNO*. (235-6)

The imagery and symbolism afforded by this scene are rich and complex: the flooded and unmoored house, carrying a crowded group of vulnerably-positioned figures, can be seen as

[58] In full, the sign reads: "When we revolt it's not for a particular culture. We revolt simply because, for many reasons, "we can no longer breathe."

a contemporary re-imagining of a slave-galley, with its cramped and water-logged quarters, sailing precariously across the water; or we can interpret this moment as a baptism of sorts, in which Esch (and her unborn baby) are plunged under the hurricane's waters in order to be figuratively reborn amidst the disaster caused by Katrina; or, relatedly, we can view this moment as a birth scene in itself, in which Katrina-as-mother gives birth to Esch ("*Who will deliver me?*"). The mention of delivery also allows the passage to be read as a Christian religious reference (or perhaps a reference to the questionability of Christian salvation narratives in the context of abnatural disaster).

My interest in this scene, however, stems from the somatic experience that all these interpretations share: a moment of breathlessness. The novel is especially effective at communicating this airless atmosphere on a formal level, through its streaming syntax and grammatical elisions, which not only emphasize the rushing terror felt by Esch in this moment, but also force the reader to experience her breathlessness by not allowing for the pause that would be lent by proper punctuation. (The longest sentence in this passage runs for a total of 343 words.) The surprising diction of the passage ("The water swallows, and I scream") and its usage of personification ("And the hurricane says *ssssssshhhhhhh*") add to the intense sense of disorientation that accompanies near asphyxiation, while also stressing the agency and interconnectedness of nonhuman actants in the Anthropocene. At the moment when Esch regains her breath, she coughs up not just water, but "the hurricane and the pit" too, emphasizing the larger, ecosystemic dynamics responsible for removing the air from her lungs. This passage thus reminds us that Esch's breathlessness involves multiple scales of time and place and exposes readers to the complexity of environmental racism, which identifies how certain communities (often of color) are treated as more expendable

than others and thus more readily exposed to ecological toxicity.[59] Ignoring the deeper, structural dimensions that led to breathlessness for many during Hurricane Katrina results in an incomplete assessment of the varied forces at play in the violent erasure of Black life. Rather than functioning as an "open commons" or "great equalizer" (think of Ulrich Beck's observation that "smog is democratic"), air indexes and reinforces contemporary inequalities along the lines of race, gender, disability, age, and class. In this context, breathing emerges as "a foremost concept for multiple kinds and scales of encounter … at a historical moment when the resources necessary for the reproduction of life, notably breathable air, are widely understood to be endangered" (Tremblay 2). Configured as the central locus of breath in this scene, Esch represents those who accumulate (and are violently exposed to) the overlooked and ignored costs of production and consumption, including the injuries or deteriorations that result from climate change and environmental ruination.

And while *Salvage the Bones* concludes in the midst of Katrina's aftermath—asking us to consider how one can live in a world that no longer exists, where "there is a great split between now and then"—it also reminds us that breathing is necessarily an act of hope and a move toward futurity (255). The sequential rhythm of respiration, after all, emphasizes how each breath, however strained, conveys the hope for another one—it is thus aspirational in both senses of the word.[60] At first glance, the scene above seems almost entirely devoid of hope: China is swept away by the flood, the puppies expire one by one, and Esch and her Daddy nearly drown as they attempt to swim toward their refuge. Nevertheless, Ward's

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[59] Environmental racism has often figured as persistent patterns of pollution and environmental toxicity that have denied breath and healthy breathing spaces to low-income communities of color. The term was coined by African American civil rights leader, Dr. Benjamin Chavis, in 1981.

[60] "Aspiration" means both to draw breath and to hope.

characters also demonstrate a commitment to living in the everyday Anthropocene that overrides the bleakness of the passage. Importantly, this commitment to inhabiting the Anthropocene is premised upon an awareness that breathing—which appears to be an individual act—is, in actuality, a highly collaborative effort. This is made evident when we recall that Skeetah's motivations for helping his sister are linked to his awareness that Esch is secretly pregnant. The novel emphasizes the significance of this information by situating this insight ("'She's pregnant.' Skeetah points.") immediately before Esch's near-drowning. From this perspective, Skeetah's effort to save Esch—to help her catch her breath—reflects his understanding that breathing occurs within a larger milieu or assemblage: Esch's ability to breathe also allows her unborn baby to breathe. Breath thus signals the emergence of life in unexpected forms and it encourages potentialities that are embodied but never individually owned; it is a generative, world-making process. And viewing respiration in terms of the relational sets into motion ideas of reciprocation and mutuality—ideas that are central for surviving in the Anthropocene. Thus, at the same time that breathing (as an entangled process) offers evidence of an individual's or collective's state of injury, it functions as a resource for collective politics and environmental justice.

Conceptualized from this standpoint, breathing gives life to an ethics of inhabitance through which individuals encounter the world and, in reaction to the challenges posed by this world (such as hurricanes), negotiate the alliances that keep them going, from unexpected collectivities to formal communities. In the novel's final moments, the narrative voice shifts, for the first time, from the first-person singular to the first-person plural, as Esch and her kin sit and wait for China in "the circle of light [they] have made in the Pit" (258). Their insistence on drawing breath together leads to a community dynamic in which "Randall will watch Junior and Big Henry will watch me and I will watch Skeetah." The act

of breathing together thus displays an environmentalist approach that spotlights the interplay between individuals and groups as these entities acclimate to, inhabit, and intervene in atmospheres of both life and loss. As atmospheric integrity continues to decline in the Anthropocene, we will need more and more stories that model and dramatize the uneven risks circulated within and around our airy commons. And *Salvage the Bones*, I would suggest, can be read as one helpful and particularly instructive model.[61]

—Part II—

"A wave of Tabanca:" Melancholia at Sea in Roffey's *Archipelago*

If *Salvage the Bones* concludes with a gesture toward the prospect of life after the tumult of ecological disaster, Monique Roffey's *Archipelago* takes this topic as its central and overarching concern. Roffey's novel begins in the aftermath of a hurricane that has devastated a small family living on the island of Trinidad. The narrative follows two characters—Gavin and his daughter Océan (along with their dog, Suzy)—as they sail across the Caribbean Sea, stopping at various islands along the way in an attempt to navigate their myriad losses and work through the climatological trauma they both have suffered. Due to this structure, *Archipelago* follows the pattern of many maritime adventure novels, though it relocates this template within a postcolonial and climate-changed environment. In doing so, the novel familiarizes its reader to the local histories and neo-colonial dynamics of a region of the world most commonly known (by outsiders) for its postcard-worthy beaches.

Recently, a number of writers and environmental activists have started to explore the contours of life "post-disaster" through the idea of "eco-grief," a term meant to capture the

[61] For writing on the importance of adding more stories to our narrative toolkit, refer to Roy Scranton's *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*, Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble*, and Ursula Le Guin's "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction."

disorienting feeling of despair that often accompanies an awareness of ecological loss. In his essay "The World is Dying—and So Are You," for example, Richard B. Anderson suggests that "at the heart of the modern age is a core of grief. At some level, we're aware that something terrible is happening, that we humans are laying waste to our natural inheritance. A great sorrow arises as we witness the changes in the atmosphere, the waste of resources and the consequent pollution, the ongoing deforestation and destruction of fisheries, the rapidly spreading deserts, and the mass extinction of species" (2001). The article then goes on to use Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's popular theory of grief to suggest a series of stages through which this "ecological grieving" might proceed both societally and individually. The idea that there is a relationship between an engagement with environmental loss and environmental responsibility, and that meaning is gained in negotiation with something that can be seriously considered grief over the condition of the world, suggests a dimension of environmental thought that has not been particularly well explored even if the fact of that loss seems, as Anderson himself describes, an all-pervasive condition of modernity. In this chapter, eco-grief is considered, specifically, through the framework of melancholia—Freud's "privileged theory of unresolved grief" (Eng and Han 669). For unlike mourning (which can locate the lost object), melancholia provides no recuperative method for recovering loss—a dynamic that speaks to our ecologically reduced and climate-changed environment.

Before turning to Roffey's treatment of melancholia in the novel, it might be useful to foreground some of the key points of Freud's work as they relate to this project. In his 1915 essay, "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud attempts to carefully parse and differentiate between two of the psychic states—mourning and melancholia—that may accompany loss. While both are "grave departures from the normal attitude to life" (252), Freud specifies that

"[m]ourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (243). As Freud continues, he explains that mourning, unlike melancholia, is a psychic process in which the loss of an object or ideal occasions the gradual withdrawal of libido from that object or ideal. In this incremental release, libido is detached bit by bit so that, eventually, the mourner is able to declare the object dead and invest in new objects. In melancholia, conversely, the ego cannot "get over" its loss and thus cannot invest in new objects. Describing melancholia as a "pathological condition," Freud explains that it arises from the subject's inability to resolve the various conflicts and ambivalences that the loss of the loved object or ideal effects. Thus instead of transferring attachment outward to a new object-cathexis, the melancholic internalizes the lost object as a way of preserving it. However, the tremendous costs of maintaining this ongoing relationship to the lost object or ideal are psychically damaging: the "distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings" (244). The melancholic, Freud explains, assumes the emptiness of the lost object or ideal, identifies with this emptiness, and thus participates in their own self-denigration and ruination of self-esteem. As Freud succinctly puts it: "In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" (246).

The "suspended, conflicted, and unresolved" dynamics of melancholia saturate *Archipelago*. Melancholia first—and then insistently—appears in the novel as a response to the unexpected death of Gavin's son and the ensuing psychological breakdown of his wife. In the wake of these losses, Gavin describes himself as "half-himself, not himself. Pathetic"

(16). He despairs at the losses that he will never be able to replace or move past: "Again a flutter in his chest, that feeling of being lost. Of having lost something he will never get back. He has never felt so empty or dumb …" (335). And he continually reflects on the presence of "a sadness in his chest, the sadness which has been with him for over a year, which has never left him, which will not go away" (349). The language in these passages closely invokes Freud's language around melancholia, which, as I discuss above, he describes as unresolveable ("[Gavin has] lost something he will never get back") debilitating (Gavin is "half-himself"), and self-denigrating (Gavin feels "pathetic" and "dumb"). Moreover, the text crystallizes this reigning affect, and re-situates it within a Caribbean context, by introducing the concept of "Tabanca"—a Trinidadian twist on melancholia:

> Tabanca. It's one of his favorite words, what Trinidadians call heartbreak … there's nothing enjoyable about being in a state of tabanca, this soft mournful feeling in his chest. It is killing him, getting the better of him over so many weeks and months, wearing him thin. He's been dying, slowly, of tabanca—that's the truth of it. The sea makes this feeling both worse and better. (248)

Like the passages above, this moment in the text emphasizes the painful and violent qualities that animate melancholia. Gavin here recognizes how his experience of melancholia (or "tabanca") is "killing him" and "wearing him thin." Importantly, however, the passage ends by noting that the sea—the source of hurricane activity—plays an important part in making this feeling both "worse and better"; in other words, it both sustains his pain and allows him to negotiate his pain. Keeping this connection between Gavin's melancholic state and the sea in mind, the remainder of this section attends to the relationship between melancholia (an *ongoing* affective state) and oceanic disaster. Placing these two aspects of the novel in conversation with one another points toward the way that hurricane disaster itself might be reconsidered and reframed as an *ongoing* process, rather than a terminal event.

One of the earlier moments in the novel to elucidate the protracted rhythms of abnatural disaster occurs during a visit to the slave huts of Bonaire. Gavin describes the visit as follows:

> [Océan] comes out of the hut and they sit with Suzy, with their backs against the pink wall of the slave hut, looking out at the calm sea. They sit there for some time, all three of them, letting the sun get quiet and the wind brush their cheeks. Océan, he can tell, is trying to work it all out: how could their home be knocked down by a giant wave which came down the mountain from nowhere? Where is Mummy? How could big men be expected to live in these tiny homes? And how do lizards float on trees? And he can see she is sitting there on the edge of things, trying to understand her life. And it's okay, only just okay for them both. (129)

Importantly, the passage begins as a meditation on the violence of slavery within the Caribbean, a history that is recalled by the mention of Bonaire's slave huts. Built in the 1850s, these slave huts served as sleeping quarters for slaves transported to the Caribbean from Western Africa. The huts are infamous for their cramped and brutally confining conditions: they stand approximately 35 inches tall, were constructed entirely from stone, and typically housed several occupants at once. Those who lived in these quarters worked under harsh conditions in Bonaire's extensive salt flats, where they extracted, collected, and shipped salt to various trading ports across Europe and the Americas. For over three centuries, the island's culture and prosperity were dependent upon this mineral resource, which was a necessary ingredient for preserving meat and fish.

This history of colonial violence in the Caribbean thus becomes a vital and active backdrop for reflecting on the realities and complications of the contemporary Atlantic world. In much the same way that *Salvage the Bones* examines the afterlife of clay mining in the context of anthropogenic climate change, this passage alludes to the ways in which the Caribbean's history of slavery and resource extraction is inextricably tied to contemporary environmental calamity. Roffey emphasizes this historical continuity through her reference to the "pink walls of the slave huts"—a description that calls to mind the "pink garden

walls" of Gavin and Océan's home in Port of Spain, thus linking these two locales across space and time. Such a perspective resonates with Sylvia Wynter's contention that the central issues of today—"struggles over the environment, global warming, [and] severe climate change"—are rooted in colonial violence across the Caribbean (260). For Wynter, colonialism in the Caribbean can be understood as a staging ground for the transmutation of black and indigenous bodies, and the natural environment, into merely inert objects for human (that is, white-settler) consumption or exploitation.[62] As such, this moment in the novel effectively writes colonialism back into the long arc of violence against the planet, allowing us to see how it manifests in the tempestuous weather patterns of the present-day Atlantic world.

Yet what's particularly unique about this passage is how it not only connects deeper histories of slavery and resource extraction to contemporary manifestations of climate catastrophe, but how it also insists that colonial histories continue to play an important part in the "post"-disaster space-time of the hurricane. This perspective is emphasized through Océan's cascading stream of questions, which activate the destructive force of disaster across three temporal registers: abnatural disaster is comprised of the Caribbean's colonial history ("big men" and "tiny homes"), the punctual violence of the hurricane ("a giant wave"), and the loss that continues to haunt Océan after the fact of the hurricane ("where is Mummy?"). Océan's inability to get over the loss of her loved ones reminds us that the dynamics that

[62] Kathryn Yusoff has recently examined this issue in *A Billion Black Antrhopocenes or None,* which explores the relationship between geology, extraction, and anthropogenic climate change. Similarly, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have observed that "global warming is envisioned as the latest state in a continuing history of natural/cultural calamities which stretches back to the original catastrophe of slavery" (89).

create and vivify abnatural disaster continue to operate even after disaster has "struck," stretching it temporal parameters beyond commonly conceived limitations.

Research on this topic (from a social sciences perspective) has reached a similar understanding. In their article on ecological grief in the Anthropocene, Ashlee Cunsolo and Neville R. Ellis observe that "ecological grief has been shown to emerge in the aftermath of acute weather-related disasters (that is, extreme weather events or natural disasters). [Studies] conducted amongst Hurricane Katrina evacuees, for example, found many people experienced significant grief as a result of losing their homes and neighbourhoods. Similar findings have also been reported in other post-hurricane and post-cyclone settings" (276). Their work, like the scene from *Archipelago* above, links "acute weather-related disasters" to the manifestation of grief in a "post-hurricane" setting. Unfortunately, their project overlooks how this insight might also reshape the temporality of hurricanes themselves, shifting these phenomena out of a framework that defines them as merely "acute." Keeping this insight in mind allows for the careful cultivation of a more inclusive and anti-colonial approach to disaster response and management, one that is alive to the cultural, psychological, and metaphysical dimensions of "disaster" as a more-than-physical and instantaneous process. In cases such as this one, the "slow violence" of abnatural disaster may require a framework of what could be termed "slow healing"—a recuperative pathway that offers an alternative to end-stopped notions of recovery.

The temporality of the hurricane is further extended and further complicated during a visit to another of the ABC islands.[63] The novel probes this dynamic through a scene in

[63] This is the nickname for a trio of closely situated islands in the southern Caribbean: Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao.

which Gavin, after speaking with a fellow traveler, reflects on the destructive and disruptive presence of lionfish in the Caribbean. Gavin explains:

> Lionfish: in the Caribbean, anyone who dives knows the tragic story. These fish originate miles away—in the Pacific Ocean. They are flamboyant to look at, tiger-striped with tendril fins which look like spikes. They are a warrior fish, dangerous predators that eat everything in their sight, especially juveniles. Six of these fish escaped from a broken tank in Florida during Hurricane Andrew, in 1992. Since then, the fish have propagated and moved south down the Antilles chain, an unstoppable invasion. … Caribbean fish do not register lionfish as predators. In the Bahamas there are only twenty-four species of fish left, so he's heard. … A hurricane hit a man-made aquarium in Florida. It spilled lionfish from the Pacific into the Caribbean Sea. A wave knocked down his home in Trinidad; they had a fish tank too. (117-19)

While their trip to see the slave huts highlights how Océan's refusal to get over her loss extends the temporality of hurricanes at the level of affect, this passage extends the temporality of hurricanes on material as well as affective levels. The passage points toward this insight by emphasizing how Hurricane Andrew's destructive repercussions rippled out far beyond the singular moment of disaster, leading to the release and rapid proliferation of lionfish in the Caribbean Sea.

The language of this passage calls to mind the unexpected repercussions that occur when "bodies tumble into bodies" in the Anthropocene (M1). In the introduction to *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, the editors describe the "riotous reproduction" of jellyfish occurring throughout the world's oceans and the disastrous consequences that this population boom entails. This population explosion, they explain, is related to the ways in which humankind has influenced the ecological conditions (through overfishing oceans and the creation of warmer water temperatures) that jellyfish typically thrive and breed in. Like jellies, lionfish thrive in the warming oceanic conditions wrought by anthropogenic climate change thanks to their "generalist diet, ability to expand their introduced range, and high fecundity" (Albano). As oceans continue to warm, scientists suggest that the lionfish will be

able to expand their range to areas that are currently too cold for their inhabitation, specifically as the 10° C isotherm expands north and south in both of the hemispheres. And Roffey's novel emphasizes the monstrous qualities of this "invasion" through language that describes the lionfish in violent and quasi-colonialist terms: they are "warrior fish, dangerous predators that eat everything in their sight, especially juveniles" (117).

By situating his own loss alongside this large-scale ecological catastrophe, Gavin signals that the hurricane that destroyed his fish tank has also given way to unintended and entangled consequences, ones that extend beyond the punctual moment of his own experience of disaster.[64] Primarily, the hurricane lingers for Gavin in the form of personal loss—namely, his wife's absence and his son's death. As with the scene featuring Océan in Bonaire, Gavin's reflection on loss in this moment is configured as a loose arrangement of seemingly disparate moments, scales, and types of ecological disruption. Yet in this scene, these disparate elements—proliferating lionfish, disrupted ecosystems, and violent waves—constellate to remind Gavin of his home's destruction and of the loss of his family.

Moreover, the passage's emphasis on the materiality of these hurricanes reminds us that these two seemingly isolated hurricane events can be linked—on a climatological level—via the sea's increasingly warming waters, which have increased hurricane activity and ecosystem collapse across the Atlantic: both are part of the hyperobject that is global warming. From this perspective, his decision to run away from the origin of the disaster (his home in Port of Spain), merely locates him within another, later point in the complex and

[64] Various Caribbean thinkers have stressed the continuities shared by seemingly disconnected events and materials. The language and imagery of accretion has also been channeled by Édouard Glissant, who proposes a poetics of "Relation" that is represented in an "aesthetics of rupture and connection … of a variable continuum, an invariant discontinuum," constituted by interdependencies and entanglement (226).

wide-ranging assemblage that constitutes anthropogenic climate change. And Gavin himself recognizes as much when he later notes that "another wave" has followed him and Océan on their journey to the Galapagos (352). This is not to say that these two hurricanes are one in the same, but rather that they may both be viewed as part of a larger, climate-changed system that is characterized by increased storm activity.

Framing loss in this way thus highlights the value of recognizing the longevity of hurricanes and reminds us that acute formulations of disaster often overlook and ignore its extended repercussions (such as ecological grief, trauma, and melancholia). With this in mind, *Archipelago* speaks to the need for disaster response that resonates with Derek Gregory's work on resisting the tendency toward treating disasters as "archipelagos of random events," ones that are deemed ahistorical and cordoned off as nationally-bound crises.[65] Overturning such a perspective may in fact serve to address injury in a more capacious sense and may lead to the development of mechanisms that more fully compensate affected people for endured climate-related losses. Rather than treating disaster recovery as a linear process with a definable endpoint, Gavin's narrative highlights how such concepts are undercut by forms of "slow violence" and neocolonial exploitation.

Gavin's melancholic refusal to "get over" his loss thus becomes a powerful strategy for "*staying with* the trouble" in the Anthropocene (Haraway 1). For, as Donna Haraway suggests, our current climate crisis "requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings" (1). As

[65] My line of thought here invokes the work of Caribbean theorists—such as Édouard Glissant and Antonio Benítez-Rojo—who think of islands as interconnected and relational, rather than isolated and alone. Epeli Hauʻofa makes a related argument about islands in the Pacific.

such, Gavin's melancholia operates as a powerful optic for envisioning our multi-scaled entwinement with "myriad configurations" as they continually unfold across our changing and warming seas. Or, to put it differently, the act of grieving becomes a process of "accept[ing] that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly forever" (Butler 20). With this understanding in mind, we can recognize how Gavin's unresolved loss and his refusal to "get over" that loss allow him an active and careful engagement with the extended aftershocks of abnatural disaster.

The instances discussed above powerfully capture the novel's investment in exploring and representing the afterlife of abnatural disaster. In both cases, our protagonists—via their melancholic dispositions—connect the distinct moment of hurricane disruption with intertwined modes, varieties, and scales of object-loss. Yet by drawing attention to these entwinements, Roffey's novel also urges us to reflect on and reconfigure traditional formulations of melancholia (without, importantly, overlooking the fact that melancholia immiserates those who feel it). While Freud, for example, understands melancholia as a narrow though highly mobile subject - "object" relation, the novel's depiction of loss as occurring within a vast network (that is comprised of individual, communal, and ecological loss) reminds us that a clean distinction between an object and a subject, particularly within the Anthropocene, cannot be so neatly sustained; as a result, a melancholic attachment to a seemingly singular or bounded object might be more dispersed than initially perceived. From this vantage, melancholia registers as neither an individual, nor pathological condition. Instead, it functions as a "depathologized structure of feeling," which underpins our everyday conflicts and struggles in the Anthropocene (Eng and Han 669).

As such, the novel's treatment of melancholia resonates with (and adds a new-materialist spin on) the work of José Esteban Muñoz, who argues that, for queer people and

for people of color, melancholia is not a pathology but an integral part of daily existence and survival. Muñoz provides a corrective to Freud's vision of melancholia as a destructive force and states that it is instead part of the

> process of dealing with all the catastrophes that occur in the lives of people of color, lesbians, and gay men. [It is other than] a pathology or as a self-absorbed mood that inhibits activism. Rather, it is a mechanism that helps us (re)construct identity and take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names—and in our names. (74)

Gavin and Océan's melancholia similarly enables them to (re)construct their identities in relation to larger histories of colonial violence in the Caribbean as well as the unexpected material-entanglements that follow disruption. Importantly, these relationships, like the ones that Muñoz attends to, are ones that have so often been erased from narratives of progress and economic development in the name of modernity. Ultimately, then, Roffey's novel amends Freudian theories of melancholia: not only does *Archipelago* invite its reader to reflect on the extended temporalities of disaster in the context of anthropogenic climate change, but just as importantly, it emphasizes the transformative potential found in maintaining and reactivating the loss that stems from abnatural disaster. The novel's depiction of melancholia thus re-charts the limitations and pathological dimensions of this psychological disposition, illustrating how loss and mourning can in fact productively entangle us in multispecies networks and trans-temporal webs of life and wreckage.

Oceanic Inhabitance

But how do these insights play out in the political and affective lives of Roffey's characters? Do Ocean and Gavin "stay with the trouble" of the Anthropocene throughout their voyage? And if so, in what ways and to what effect? Much like *Salvage the Bones, Archipelago* crafts an ethics of inhabitance for occupying the extended time-space of abnatural disaster. While Ward's novel focuses on the politics of breath and breathing in the wake of

Hurricane Katrina, Roffey's novel explores an ethics of inhabitance that centers on careful engagement with our planet's rising waters.

To develop the novel's depiction of oceanic inhabitance, my analysis builds on Stacy Alaimo's work in *Exposed*, where she wonders: "Would it be possible to redesign the domestic with an ethics of inhabiting such that the domestic does not domesticate and the walls do not disconnect? An ethics of inhabiting revels in the pleasure of interconnection and the joy of the unexpected; it embraces the possibilities of becoming in relation to a radical otherness that has been known as 'nature'" (17). This mode of domesticity, according to Alaimo, is positioned against traditional conceptions of the domestic as the defining container for the Western "human," where it functions as a bounded space, created by delusions of safety, bolstered by consumerism, and fueled (literally and figuratively) by nationalist fantasies. My analysis, in turn, extends (or submerges) Alaimo's proposal—which is primarily land-based—by taking it to the sea, an important recontextualization considering the risk many island nations face today as a result of rising ocean levels.

We first encounter a glimpse of Roffey's vision of oceanic inhabitance when we learn the history of the vessel (Romany) that Gavin and Océan reside in throughout their journey across the Caribbean Sea. Gavin's initial description of the boat gestures toward an understanding of domesticity that extends beyond traditional, Western conceits of the domestic sphere; he explains:

> Romany sits in the back of the bay, quiet and self-assured. She's small and slim and old-fashioned with her teak wash-boards, hatches and locker tops. … A Danish boat, she was sailed by the last owner to Trinidad across the Atlantic. A Great Dane is what she's called, a GD28, only two hundred and fifty ever made. Her long leaden keel gives her a low centre of gravity. She is a stable boat, designed by a sailor, and Olympic medalist. Romany's hull is navy blue and her sails are white. The word ROMANY is stenciled on her in pale blue curly capitals. She looks shy on water, but ready: easy to underestimate this small sailboat. His heart thrills gazing at her. (27)

In this description, Roffey imbues the boat with a mythic and animate history, one typically not ascribed to common conceptions of the domestic. The boat is instead located within a transnational history, which provides details on the place of her construction (she was built in Denmark), her rarity (Romany is uniquely crafted, not a mass-produced commodity), and her record of success in sailing across the Atlantic (which is how she ended up in Trinidad). The passage, moreover, saturates Romany with a sense of agency and subjectivity not typically ascribed to typical domestic spaces. She is "stable," and "shy," but also "ready" for whatever nautical adventures lie ahead. This brief "biography" of the boat thus paints a rich, complex picture of Romany as more than simply a space of habitation.

Through this passage, however, we also observe the ways in which the novel's vision of oceanic inhabitance is still, at this point, fairly limited in that it operates within more traditional frameworks. One obvious example of this appears in the gendering of the ship as female, a tradition dating back to the sixteenth century, when "the ship [was first] attributed with feminine qualities and figureheads" (DeLoughrey 44). According to Elizabeth DeLoughrey, "symbols of femininity are vital to sustain [male] receptivity to intercultural contact and to maintain their mobile structure of the domestic. … A symbolic grammar of feminized vessels and flows enables the homosocial community on the ship … to reproduce, both narratively and as agents of history" (44). For DeLoughrey, in other words, the gendering of the ship as female allows male subjects/sailors to operate as individuals who are bounded and independent, yet mobile and capable of reproduction and procreation (without having to actually include women on the ship). Within the context of *Archipelago*, this normative, gendered dynamic (initially, at least) gives Gavin the confidence to travel across the Caribbean archipelago (experiencing a sort of "intercultural contact" with its various locales) and grants him control over his and Océan's narrative (allowing him to

function as an agent of "history" and of narrative), while also retaining a sense of "traditional" domesticity in light of his wife's physical absence. Océan's presence on the ship, moreover, only seems to reinforce this gendered structure, as Roffey notes that "she has organised all the tins for him, stowing them on the tiny shelves and in cupboards by label colour, all the bottles, then her clothes" (33). Océan's actions thus add another layer of traditional domesticity to the boat, and they do so without interfering with Gavin's ability to retain narrative command and control of the voyage.

As the novel progresses, however, Roffey slowly articulates a profoundly new vision of inhabitance, one which subverts and radically re-imagines what it means to make a home at sea. This sea-change is first dramatized by the arrival of Phoebe, a female sailor who responds to Gavin's posting for a crew member while they're docked in San Nicolas, Aruba. Gavin's initial response to Phoebe is obviously sexist: "But he wanted a man. A small man with muscles, who can hoist sails, who can harpoon whales if need be. Not a blonde woman" (190). Yet it quickly becomes clear that Phoebe's knowledge of sailing far outstrips Gavin's own. Not only does Phoebe immediately display familiarity with the model of Gavin's boat (she reveals: "I learnt to sail on a Great Dane in Sweden"), but she actually ends up saving Gavin's and Océan's lives as they are sailing through the San Blas archipelago, a group of islands off the Isthmus of Panama. During a particularly treacherous stretch of the voyage, Océan falls off her bed in the cabin and injures her leg: "a star-shaped gash, the flesh on the shin all this way and that, and he can see yellowy muscle and deeper layer tissue flapping" (248-9). Gavin tries to mend the wound, but the thought that "Océan could ever be hurt, that another of his children could die" immobilizes him, causing him to faint on the cabin floor. He awakens to find Phoebe bandaging Océan's leg, after she has stabilized the boat and "lashed the tiller" (250). Moments like this one trouble the gender

roles initially coded by the vessel's feminization, and subvert narratives that position male sailors as the only individuals capable of successfully navigating marine environments. In returning to DeLoughrey's argument, such moments can thus be understood as challenging the notion of who has the ability to produce narrative and history.

Roffey's vision for oceanic inhabitance not only reconfigures the ship as an egalitarian space in relation to (human) gender, but also imagines the ship as a multispecies cooperative, a space that welcomes rather than expels the nonhuman. The novel explores this idea during Gavin and Océan's journey into the Pacific Ocean (after they've crossed through the Panama Canal), during which the boat becomes a refuge for a blue-footed booby, who appears with "her exhausted young child" (303). Gavin observes:

> The birds seem more than relieved to see their boat. They are more than four hundred and fifty miles away from land. The boobies sit on the rails on the starboard bow for most of the morning, shitting heaps of guano, which is full of acid and very hard to remove from the deck. … Océan cannot believe the blue feet of the birds, or rather bright turquoise. … The baby booby in particular seems utterly content to be on board. It is sitting up there, resting, some of its own snowy chick feathers still stuck to its head. Océan wants a closer look. (303)

Rather than reacting to the birds as avian trespassers, Océan and Gavin reimagine their boat as a permeable and diverse habitat. This act involves making space for nonhuman animal behavior and culture, and it encourages humans to confront the world as it actually exists, rather than as a static backdrop or an anthropocentric domain of control and domination. The passage underscores this perspective by noting in detail how the birds excrete "heaps of guano, which is full of acid and very hard to remove" onto the deck of their home. Rather than being banished for soiling the floor, the birds are allowed to behave as they normally might while residing in another habitat. The birds, in other words, are able to act as they please without Gavin's and Océan's interference or objections.

Human-avian interaction thus does not lead to discomfort or violence in this passage; rather, it yields a sense of awe and wonder for these spectacular creatures. Océan's reaction, in particular, embraces an environmentalist perspective, one that believes that "affirming one's own becoming is maximized in the affirmation of the becoming of others" (Colebrook 88). This idea of inter-species becoming is further reinforced through a subsequent scene, in which "the mother bird flies off, looking for fish to feed her child" (304). The mother's departure prompts Océan to ask, "How does the baby bird know she'll come back," which in turn motivates further reflection on her own mother's disappearance and the possibility of her mother's return. And while these passages might be seen as anthropomorphizing the blue-footed boobies to a certain extent (depicting the birds as tired guests, "relieved to see their boat"), they also effectively acknowledge the complex intelligence of birds, their agency, and their right to nest in an allegedly "human" space. Against the model of the home that is static—the home as a fixed property, as an impermeable space of defense against the risks introduced by others—this passage ultimately enables one to imagine home as a place where the becoming of other creatures productively informs our own possibilities for becoming.

Just as an ethics of oceanic inhabitance entails inviting what is outdoors in, it also necessitates, conversely, turning the human outdoors (Alaimo 32). *Archipelago* provides an array of moments that depict Gavin and Océan stepping into or submerging themselves within unfamiliar aquatic environments. I highlight here, however, an instance that examines the interrelated issues of domesticity and wilderness, while also showing a potentially darker side to the avian example I've discussed above. While in San Nicolas, Aruba, Gavin and Océan visit Baby Beach (a lagoon located behind a Valero oil refinery), where the sea is famously calm and flat. As Gavin and Océan enter the water, they find themselves suddenly

surrounded by "hundreds of fish in the sea around them. Fat fish. Oversized, overfed silvery reef fish. Aggressive-looking parrotfish with razor-sharp choppers" (198). We soon learn that the fish have learned to congregate in this area as a result of tourists "feeding them chunks of banana and pieces of cheese." Océan, given a piece of cheese by a Dutch tourist, sticks her hand in the water to feed the fish and is bitten by a fish in its attempt to snatch up the food. Upon hearing Océan scream from the bite, Gavin rapidly yanks her from the water and starts shouting at the Dutchman who had given her the snack: "You stupid man. … You should not feed these fish. They are WILD, wild creatures. Leave them alone." It's important to note that Gavin's reaction, in part, partakes in a problematic discourse of wilderness that has been troubled and debunked by a number of environmental historians and eco-critics, perhaps most famously by William Cronon in his essay "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." Nevertheless, it is also crucial to recognize the ways in which this passage underscores the importance of recognizing that humans should interact differently (and embody specific, contingent forms of care) when interacting with different habitats and different species. As Alaimo puts it, "an environmental ethic of inhabiting would, first and foremost, respect the habitat requirements of nonhuman creatures" (33). One of the "habitat requirements" of parrotfish that humans should respect is their diet, which consists of a fast-growing sponge species typically found in (our increasingly vanishing) coral reefs, not "chunks of banana and pieces of cheese." In other words, it's not simply enough to cohabitate with other animals or to step beyond traditional domestic boundaries: an attentive and ethically responsible vision of oceanic domesticity is attuned to how human actions are entangled with wider ecological assemblages—assemblages that can be damaged by the irresponsible encroachment of humans into non-human animal habitats. (And, as this passage suggests, they can inflict

damage on humans as well.) Gavin's indignation thus pushes back against posthuman perspectives that would deny nonhuman nature its own particular agency, emphasizing instead the opacity and active presence of the non-human world.

The interactions examined above provide particularly telling examples of the novel's vision of oceanic inhabitance—what I understand as an ethics of dwelling in/on/by the water that provokes one to imagine ways of living that do not shore up the boundaries of the (male) human subject by rendering other lives into dead or inert material. Oceanic inhabitance, rather, opens up the human self to forms of kinship, intersubjectivity, and interconnection with non-human nature, especially within the context of rising waters and marine pollution. In doing so, oceanic inhabitance complicates a ship's traditional "hydrarchy" (defined by Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker as "the organization of the maritime state from above, and the self-organization of the sailors from below") and shows how marginalized subjects and non-human actants can radically destabilize and rearrange a vessel's organizational structure, along with its attendant formulations and distributions of power (144).

Roffey's illustration of oceanic inhabitance thus radically differs from other modes of nautical experience that have come to characterize life in the Caribbean, such as cruise ship colonialism, which Gavin at one point in the novel describes as "grotesque" and a "spectacle" (110). Rather, this mode of living performs a powerful critique of colonialism, anthropocentrism, consumer capitalism, and gender inequality, in order to provide a vital topos for envisioning otherwise, for behaving in different ways, and perhaps even for cultivating individuals who yearn to live in anti-capitalist economic domains. Toward that end, *Arhipelago*'s vision of oceanic inhabitance illustrates how human corporeality and human practices are immersed within larger environments and affected by particular, embedded

encounters. As water-levels continue to rise around the world, and storms continue to unfurl (and linger) with fierce intensity, we will need new models of inhabitance to survive. And *Archipelago*, I have suggested, invites us to envision one such model.

Conclusion: The Break of Dawn

In her short essay, "Dawn After the Tempests," Caribbean writer Edwidge Danticat recalls travelling to the island of Grenada in the aftermath of the 2017 hurricane season—the summer in which Hurricanes Irma and Maria pummeled numerous islands across the Caribbean. In the essay, Danticat explains that she was visiting Grenada in order to receive an honorary degree from the University of the West Indies Open Campus, which was simultaneously hosting a State of the Tourism Industry Conference, focused on "disaster preparedness as well as recovery and rebuilding" (2017). The confluence of these events leads Danticat to reflect, in the essay, on the various islands she has visited—and hopes to visit—across the Caribbean. In the context of Irma and Maria, though, she now worries whether she will be able to visit the Caribbean region that she calls home; she writes, "the blessings of our islands are also our curse. Our geography gives us year-round sun and beautiful beaches, but more and more in the age of climate change, we are on the front line of destruction" (ibid.). Despite her very real concern that the Caribbean exists on the "front line" of climate change, Danticat concludes her essay by quoting one of her favorite American poets, Audre Lorde, who wrote: "Much has been terribly lost in Grenada but not all—not the spirit of the people … We speak because the Dawn Breaks" (29). Though Lorde was writing in the context of 1983 United States' invasion of her parents' homeland, and not as a response to climate disaster, Danticat summons Lorde's writing in order to emphasize the dialectical quality of disaster: that despite the terrible ruin that it brings to

many, it also contains the possibility for resilience and unexpected life. Disaster, in other words, emanates a capacity for negativity and for optimism.

My chapter has sought to illuminate and explore the dialectic of disaster, particularly as it manifests in the hurricane fiction of Jesmyn Ward and Monique Roffey.[66] For these novelists, the destructive aspect of disaster is most fully registered (and engaged with) when we account for the elongated space-time of abnatural disaster, understanding it as a phenomenon that exists beyond its common conceptualization as a punctual "event."[67] Ward's novel explores the temporality of disaster by attending to the ways in which the legacies of colonial racism survive in and saturate the novel's Southern atmosphere. The novel's protagonist, Esch, experiences these aerial legacies in two primary forms: through the discriminatory oversights of weather-forecasting systems in the town of Bois Sauvage, and through the materiality of the hurricane itself, which is fueled by the destructive logics of Western development. Roffey's novel, on the other hand, considers how the disastrous repercussions of the hurricane flow beyond a punctual framing. As Gavin and Océan sail across the islands of the Caribbean, they are haunted by the loss of family that has resulted from hurricane disaster, and they are continually entangled in the unexpected webs of ecological disruption that have been caused by anthropogenic climate change. Reading these texts alongside one another thus allows for a fuller picture of abnatural disaster's temporality,

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[66] Brathwaite reflects on the dialectics of catastrophe in his text *MR* and comments on how the negative fracture caused by disaster also entails an optimistic reconstruction: "the making/discovery/improvisationary recovery of new/ancient necessary survival/transcendent concept(s)/forms … thru habilitation/rememory/adaptation/improvization … into forms of maronage/possession/resistances into the emancipation/liberation of space/time/anima" (370).

[67] As such, they dramatize Joseph Masco's contention that "crisis talk today seeks to stabilize an institution, practice, or reality rather than interrogate the historical conditions of possibility for that endangerment to occur" (73).

its complexity, and its geographical reach.[68] Moreover, they allow us to see how colonialism has played and continues to play a foundational role in animating and extending disaster in our climate-changed world.

Just as importantly, however, each novel also articulates a powerful imaginative pathway for getting through the tempestuous weather patterns of the Anthropocene. In Ward's novel, this hopeful imaginary hinges on a centering of black breath, especially in atmospheres of asphyxiation. By spotlighting the politics and potentialities of breath, Ward's novel urges us to reconceptualize the embeddedness in which we are all already in and have the potential to renegotiate. Her work urges us, in other words, to stage the grounds for a collective reimagining that allows for aspiration—for an atmospheric otherwise. Roffey's novel focuses on the necessity for re-thinking ways of living with, in, and on our planet's rising waters. This mode of "oceanic inhabitance," which acknowledges the myriad ways in which seemingly fundamental boundaries have begun to come undone in the Anthropocene, depicts a form of ethical engagement, one that radiates from anti-colonial environmentalist practices. Together, then, these novels also theorize the potential that can arise in the wake/midst of disaster.

Most recently, hurricane conditions across the Atlantic have continued to worsen. Atmospheric scientists, environmental historians, and other environmental advocates have begun exploring the ways that the increase in air and water temperatures and the rise in sea levels—all byproducts of global warming—are escalating the frequency, scale, duration, and

[68] These novels, in other words, productively distend the bounds of our vocabulary for dealing with climate and ecological disaster in order to make space for considering and confronting its racialized elements.

intensity of hurricanes.[69] In light of the ways that hurricane destruction has grown, its essential to attend to those communities and perspectives on the frontline (and here it is the coastline) of anthropogenic climate change. By acknowledging these experience, we can learn of the strategies of resilience, empowerment, and self-determination that affected peoples have devised (and continue to produce) in the face of climate collapse. Such perspectives, this chapter has suggested, are absolutely necessary for cultivating an anti-colonial approach to disaster studies, and for imagining a framework that enables us to survive, and potentially even flourish, in the challenging space-time of hurricane disaster—"the loudest and most insistent political message and material instantiation of the Anthropocene today" (Yusoff 104).

[69] See, for example, the work of atmospheric scientist Kerry Emanuel and the work of historian Stuart B. Schwartz, in particular *Sea of Storms: History of Hurricanes in the Greater Caribbean from Columbus to Katrina*.

Chapter Two

Mega-drought and the Unseasonable Youth of

Paulo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* and Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book*

> Still came sand in sheets, sand erasing the sun for hours then days, sand softening the corners of stucco strip malls, sand whistling through the holes bored in the ancient adobe of mission churches. Still came the wind. Still came ceaseless badland bluster funneled by the Sierra Nevada. Still came all the wanderlusting topsoil of Brigham Young's aerated Southwest free at last, the billowing left-behind of tilled scrub, the aloft fertilizer crust of manifest destiny. Ashes in the plow's wake, Mulholland's America.
>
> ~Claire Vaye Watkins, *Gold Fame Citrus*

Introduction: Thinking Like a Sand Dune

The passage above, taken from Claire Vaye Watkins's *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015), paints a striking portrait of the American Southwest, a landscape desiccated by a decades-long mega-drought induced by anthropogenic climate change. In the novel, Watkins envisions a post-apocalyptic world in which the Mojave Desert has been transformed by fifty years of unrelenting wind, sand, and heat (highlighted in the passage above through the anaphoric repetition of "still") into a vast dune field that soon becomes so immense it can only be termed a sea—the Amargosa Dune Sea. The Amargosa, ceaselessly shifting and constantly growing, spreads to devour an extensive portion of the region, from Los Angeles to Las Vegas and beyond. Officially uninhabited and uninhabitable, it makes its way steadily eastward, consuming the landscape like a wildfire and decimating the myth of the American Southwest, "an all-too-plausible eco-apocalypse" in the era of climate shift ("Fiction Unbound").

I begin this chapter with a reference to Watkins's novel to highlight how contemporary literary depictions of drought emphasize a very different set of representational issues from other forms of abnatural disaster, such as the hurricane. While hurricanes are often depicted in terms of the punctual or sudden (though my first chapter

foregrounds novels that complicate such representation), drought—which is defined as a prolonged condition of dryness or aridity—must necessarily be understood in terms of its slowed temporal rhythms and dispersed physicality. It functions, in other words, as a form of slow violence, "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). One consequence of this slowed and expanded tempo, however, is that human presence tends to fall out of the narrative frame. We glimpse this dynamic in the passage above, which explicitly neglects depictions of the human subject, and chronicles instead the various ways that time eradicates feats of human engineering (such as stucco strip malls and mission churches) and products of human design (fertilizer and plow marks), which are dispersed into far-flung locales.[70] In place of the human, the novel foregrounds the Amargosa, an active, agential, and plot-driving force in the novel's narrative.

For Watkins (and, I would argue, for many other environmentalist thinkers, such as Amitav Ghosh and Dipesh Chakrabarty) this moment in the novel thus dramatizes a key representational dilemma in the Anthropocene: to understand the true complexity and scope of global warming, one must think at the outsized and inhuman scales of the Amargosa Dune Sea. Yet is such large-scale thinking possible for the human subject? If it is possible, what form might such a multi-scalar imagination take? If such multi-scalar thinking is not possible, then how can cultural form mediate and intervene in the most urgent issue facing the world today? And what is at stake (or to gain) in the elision of a human-based perspective in a narrative? While Watkins, in an interview with Kyle McCauley, seems

[70] It's important to note that while human presence drops from the narrative description, the material byproducts of human culture do not. The inhuman life spans of plastic and radiation attest to this, existing as they do within the timeframe of deep temporality.

interested in the possibility for humans to think with sand dunes, she also expresses a certain level of doubt over humankind's ability to access and represent the vast scope of anthropogenic climate change. She notes, "My heart doesn't race when I think of climate change. … If you're not really capable of thinking in geologic time … what do you do with that?" (Vaye Watkins).[71] Such feelings of hesitation and doubt dovetail with Amitav Ghosh's concerns in *The Great Derangement*, where he wonders whether "the currents of global warming [are] too wild to be navigated in the accustomed barques of narration" and where he questions whether "certain literary forms are unable to negotiate [the] torrents" of global warming (8). Ghosh ultimately responds to these concerns by arguing that the mainstream "modern novel" does not engage with climate change because the topic is too big for a genre that specializes in depth psychology. Like Ghosh, Watkins attributes this uncertainty to what she sees as imaginative or empathetic "failing" on part of the human species. While Watkins communicates a level of uncertainty around the question of whether climate change can make the "heart race," this chapter argues that contemporary climate drought fiction has, in fact, effectively achieved this seemingly elusive cardiac effect.

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[71] Vaye Watkins elaborates on this sentiment as follows: "In the case of climate change people say, I'm so afraid! I say, Are you really? I recognize it and I trust scientists that say bad things are going to come (I'm not a denier at all), but emotionally I can't really access the fear. I think why climate change is interesting to novelist is that it illuminates an imaginative failing or an empathetic failure we might have as a species: 'I can't really think that way.' It's kind of the byproduct of this tension that's always been involved in my writing process, which is zooming back and forth between the micro and macro. If I had my way, I would probably just write about—I really did have a sand dune for a long time as the only character in the book. I would write tens of pages just about the geologic formation of a valley and what the air feels like there and on and on, and then finally my readers early on would say, 'Why don't you put some people in here?' I'm really interested in thinking about macro geologic time, but then what I really like as a reader is the messiness of a relationship, just two people trying to figure it out." Here, Vaye Watkins touches on several points that will be pertinent to my analysis: the novel's ability to zoom back and forth across the micro and macro; and the ability of human relationships to reflect larger scale concerns.

To make this case, my analysis focuses on two contemporary examples of climate fiction: Paulo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* (2015), which takes place in the U.S. Southwest, and *The Swan Book* (2013) by Alexis Wright, which takes place in Australia. There are numerous reasons to read these two texts alongside each other: both novels depict dystopian visions of parched future worlds; both texts attend to the ways in which border matters (i.e. the policing, maintenance, fortification, and re-drawing of borders with national and across transnational spaces) are exacerbated by wars over water and resources; both novels explore how marginalized communities often face the most severe blowback of ecological catastrophe; and both novels examine how techno-fixes to environmental problems (such as water scarcity) often exacerbate the problems they are designed to circumvent. Yet the most compelling parallel, as I will explore throughout this chapter, is the way that both narratives rely upon—and then distort or desiccate—the generic form of the bildungsroman in order to explore the multiscalar dynamics of drought and resource exhaustion in the Anthropocene.[72]

Building on critical examinations of the bildungsroman genre (while also engaging with contemporary eco-critical work), my chapter asks, in short, what the novel of subject formation looks like in the age of the Anthropocene, a question which puts climate change and literary form into conversation with each other.[73] This chapter thus reads *The Water Knife* and *The Swan Book* as desiccated *bildungsromane* in order to explore how they dramatize a breakdown of subjective temporality whose roots lie not only in the disrupted temporalities

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[72] This is a literary trend that I've come across in several works of climate fiction, such as James Whyle's *The Excavations*; *For the Mercy of Water* by Karen Jayes, *Cloud Atlas* by David Mitchell, and *Locust Girl: A Love Song* by Merlinda Bobis.

[73] Specifically, this chapter engages with Moretti's *Way of the World*, Slaughter's *Human Rights Inc.*, and Esty's *Unseasonable Youth.* Another way of formulating my central question, following Esty, would be: What does it mean to be unseasonable in a meteorological sense?

of global capitalism, but in the climatological crisis precipitated by global capitalism and colonial violence. What happens, in other words, when the endless dynamism of capitalism meets its material limitations? And relatedly, what happens to the genre of the bildungsroman when the form of the nation-state begins to splinter as a result of environmental crisis?

My reading of this dynamic is channeled through the figure of the climate refugee, whose existence in each text renders visible the contradictions inherent in mainstream developmental discourses of self, nation, and empire in the context of global warming and its multi-scalar dynamics. Section I of this chapter focuses on the character of Maria Villarosa in *The Water Knife* to develop the idea of "barren life" in the Anthropocene. This term (furthering Georgio Agamben's work on the concept of bare life), exemplifies the precarious conditions and possibilities of life under the conditions of a neo-imperial, drought-stricken state. Section II further develops the category of "barren life" by attending to *The Swan Book*'s depiction of sexual violence against the character Oblivia Ethelyne (also a climate refugee), an act that that renders her barren in various physiological senses. Ultimately, however, I argue that the text may be read through indigenous and anticolonial perspectives that subvert and challenge ideas of what a barren life might hold. My hope is that reading these novels as desiccated *bildungsromane* yields insight into various logics of (uneven) development, resource exhaustion, and even of potential liberation at work in the face of global warming.

—Part I—

Liquid Empires, Barren Life: On (Not) Growing Up in Bacigalupi's Dystopian Southwest

Before proceeding with the cases of Bacigalupi and Wright, it might be useful to spend some time mapping out the historical trajectory of the bildungsroman, and examine why this genre, in particular, is useful for modeling the climatological conditions of anthropogenic drought. Popularized in the late 19th century, the term bildungsroman is a conjunction of the German words *bildung*, meaning education, and *roman*, meaning novel. The form, then, can be translated as the novel of education. Traditionally, novels placed within this genre tend to feature a thoughtful, curious protagonist who goes out into the world in order to further his moral and psychological growth. Eventually, after a series of defining struggles, he finds acceptance and settles down to his place within society.[74] In his text, *The Way of the World*, Franco Moretti elaborates upon the genre's proliferation in the 19th century. Here, Moretti argues that the European bildungsroman's historical purpose was to organize and mediate the effects of modernization by framing its infinite dynamism within a more fixed narrative form. To become an effective symbolic form, however, the master trope of youth required a narrative counterpoint, which writers located in the state of adulthood. According to Moretti, the young protagonist's open development (signifying modernization) is eventually contained by the writer's decision to impose the static timeframe of adulthood. This narrative stage disrupts the roll of developmental time, stopping the bildungsroman from becoming an infinitely extending story, while simultaneously rendering modernity into a phenomenon that is less threatening, and more human.

Yet if the bildungsroman gives form to modernity's boundless development through the vitality of youth, then what symbolic equivalence might be attached to the tempering

[74] I employ the pronoun "he" in this instance to mark how the bildungsroman traditionally featured a male protagonist.

condition of adulthood? Jed Esty tackles this question in his text, *Unseasonable Youth,* which argues that "the historical referent for the countertrope of adulthood" is the discourse of the nation. In his text, Esty persuasively examines how the discourse of the nation grants the realist bildungsroman with a language of social and historical continuity in the midst of industrialization's dramatic changes and societal shifts. "What Moretti's model leaves unexplored," Esty explains, "is the crucial symbolic function of nationhood, which gives a finished form to modern societies in the same way that adulthood gives a finished form to the modern subject" (4). With this premise in place, Esty goes on to examine a set of modernist texts (ranging from Olive Schreiner's *Story of An African Farm* to Jean Rhys's *Voyage in the Dark*) in order to track subject formation in the age of Empire. Through this methodological approach, Esty discovers that each of these novels utilize the trope of arrested development to illustrate how "colonialism introduces into the historicist frame of the bildungsroman the form-fraying possibility that capitalism cannot be moralized into the progressive time of the nation" (17). The figure of unseasonable youth, in other words, unsettles the well-established conventions of the bildungsroman in order to question bourgeois values and to reimagine the biographical novel, while also exploring the paradoxes inherent in Western ideologies of progress, buttressed as they are by imperialism and global capitalism.[75] For Esty, the trope of unseasonable youth embodies—"at the level of language and plot"—the new, open-ended phase of global imperial capitalism, with its uneven rhythms of development and advancement. To conclude his analysis, Esty observes that the genre of the bildungsroman has continued to operate today as a vital cultural and artistic

[75] Esty further comments on this dialectic by noting, "These are places where imperialism—in its late and bloated form—unsettles the bildungsroman and its humanist ideals, producing jagged effects on both the politics and poetics of subject formation" (2).

force, particularly within postcolonial and decolonial spaces, which continue to grapple with questions of national and economic development.

It is with this understanding in mind that I now turn to the work of American writer Paulo Bacigalupi. Bacigalupi is perhaps best known for his imaginative work in genre fiction, much of which contemplates the collapse of ecological systems and the possibility of human survival. Though he is not from the U.S. South himself, tellingly, much of his fiction envisions the consequences of climate shift as they are felt and experienced in the U.S. or global South.[76] Bacigalupi's breakout novel *The Windup Girl* (2009), for example, takes place largely in an ecologically devastated Thailand. In this novel, Bacigalupi portrays a post-oil and commercial driven-world, powered by calories: spring-driven motors are wound up by bioengineered mammoths on treadmills. His 2010 novel, *Ship Breaker,* depicts a flooded, dystopian world about one-hundred years in the future. It follows a group of ship breakers living on the U.S. Gulf Coast, who pull valuable copper wire out of the now-obsolete oil tankers that litter the coast. Bacigalupi has commented on the significance of fiction in helping individuals understand climate change by noting that, "as a fiction writer, you actually have an opportunity to go at the same ideas [about 'policy' and 'abstractions'], but you can make them engaging. You don't have to stick only to the facts, because you can move them into the future. You can say 'What if this water management fails? What if it succeeds? What kind of world does this build? What kind of policy does this world build?' And then you place characters in that world, and then the reader gets to live viscerally in that

[76] Commenting on the significance of place in his writing, Bacigalupi explains: "In a hundred years – if we understand that global warming is going to be changing certain dynamics, if we understand that the sea levels are rising, if we understand that hurricanes are going to be more frequent, not less – how much sense does it make to say we're going to rebuild New Orleans, when it's clearly in a hideously vulnerable place? Physical location is illustrative for me, in terms of larger themes, always" (Juris).

world." Unlike Vaye Watkins, then, Bacigalupi suggests that the novel, precisely because of its ability to compress and vivify large-scale abstractions, serves as a useful climate model for understanding the less-easily graspable dimensions of anthropogenic climate change.

Bacigalupi's 2014 novel, *The Water Knife,* takes into consideration the current water-crisis in the Southwest—a "permanent aridification long in the making" (Robbins). In this novel, Bacigalupi imagines the consequences of a relentless drought—engendered by resource exhaustion and anthropogenic climate change—and powerfully envisions the ensuing slow collapse of this arid region. Within this future world, Bacigalupi chronicles the entwined experiences of three central characters: journalist Lucy, a successful and dogged reporter, who is following a story about mass murder and political corruption; Angel, the titular water knife, a corporate assassin and spy who works for the Southern Nevada Water Authority against rival agencies representing Arizona and California; and Maria, a young Texan refugee displaced by climate change, who lives by her wits on the dangerous criminal fringes of a decaying society. All three of these characters are linked by their interest in or connection to an old water-rights document, which would entitle the owner of said rights to the Colorado river's dwindling water supply. The state that procures these water rights will be able to extend its survival for just a little bit longer—and in doing so, it will doom the other Southwestern states to a dusty death. The novel thus engages with and extrapolates upon many of the political and hydrological issues facing the Southwest today, projecting them into a future world where environmental destruction continues to run rampant and where environmentalist warnings have remained unheeded.[77]

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[77] Several manuscripts have been written on the issue of water-shortage in the American Southwest. For more on this topic, see *Cadillac Desert* by Marc Reisner, *Bird of Fire* by Andrew Ross, and *Where the Water Goes* by David Owen. Yale Environment 360 has also provided extensive coverage on this topic: see their series, "Crisis on the Colorado."

As this brief summary suggests, the premise of *The Water Knife* rests upon what Esty and others have identified as one of the central contradictions of global capitalism: in a capitalist system, development for some necessarily requires underdevelopment for others. Or, as the Warwick Collective writes, "[c]apitalist modernisation entails development, yes—but this 'development' takes the forms also of the development of underdevelopment, of maldevelopment and dependent development. If urbanisation, for instance, is clearly part of the story, what happens in the countryside as a result is equally so" (12). In *Unseasonable Youth*, Esty examines how this contradiction of global capitalism ("that it seeks to underdevelop and develop at the same time") plays out within the narrative form of the 20th century bildungsroman, such as in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (93). Esty's reading of *Kim*, for example, examines how Kipling's antidevelopmental bildungsroman literalizes the problem of colonialism as failed or postponed modernization, arguing that "the long youth/sudden death motif of Kim himself is a fitting emblem for that exposed contradiction" of global capitalism and new imperialism (93). Kim's endless youth, in other words, mirrors the endlessly deferred political modernization of colonial India.

In *The Water Knife,* however, these contradictory developmental dynamics arise within an strictly national framework, examining how internal water-wars can radically reshape a nation's geopolitics. The novel thus reworks Esty's examination of developmental and mal-developmental dynamics— which, in his analysis, take place in the "colonial contact zones" of the British Empire—by domesticating them. We see this shift, for example, through the novel's description of how certain states, such as California and Nevada, "successfully" (from a capitalist perspective) navigate their continued development through the violent theft of water, while other states, such as Arizona and Texas, have necessarily devolved into sites of under- or maldevelopment due to their inability to access the Colorado's ever-

diminishing water sources. The novel outlines the disastrous repercussions of this internal collapse through its description of "the State Independence and Sovereignty Act"—a policy that allows states to police and violently defend their own borders in order to inhibit climate refugees who are fleeing from completely barren places (such as Texas and Mexico) from entering into states that still have some degree of access to water (such as Nevada and California).

Bacigalupi fleshes out this portrait of a fractured United States through the novel's dystopian atmosphere. Deploying grotesque and often violent imagery, he describes the nation as a "crumbling" territory, populated by "scalps [that] appeared as warning signs on interstates," and featuring "Texans that were strung up on New Mexico fence lines as warnings" and drones that circle like buzzards above shrinking water supplies (42).[78] Importantly, this necropolitical landscape is the product of local "militias [that] sprang up on the border perched along the shoulder of the Colorado River, looking across the waters toward Arizona and Utah" (81-82). Such descriptions of a lawless Southwest call to mind Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, with its "hellish" Southwestern landscape, characterized by "charred human skulls, blood-soaked scalps, a tree hung with the bodies of dead infants"

[78] In his 2003 article, titled "Necropolitics," Mbembe draws on Michel Foucault's work on biopolitics in order to theorize what he terms necropower: the "subjugation of life to the power of death" (39). For Mbembe, biopolitics entails a necropolitical element, one that foregrounds the right to expose people—whose death is considered beneficial to the whole population—to the possibility of death. Necropolitics can thus be understood as the enactment of sovereignty in cases where "the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations" is the central project of power, rather than autonomy in itself (14). Mbembe conceptualizes necropolitical power through a particular space of violence: the slave plantation, a site that does not (necessarily) involve the outright killing of individuals, but relies instead on their slow biological degradation or wounding.

(James).[79] Like McCarthy's novel, which depicts the U.S. Southwest (in the mid-19th century) as its borders are in the process of being violently forged and enforced, *The Water Knife* presents a dystopian, future world in which those same borders are being renegotiated—once again through similarly brutal means. The resonance here works to utterly dismantle mythic narratives of American progress and development, showcasing instead how the consolidation of the U.S. empire has always relied upon the dynamics of combined and uneven development (climate change, however, renders it differently visible). The novel's foregrounding of this developmental process in the context of an unrelenting megadrought, moreover, gives formal expression to a central aspect of anthropogenic climate change: that it is simultaneously a global (in that it reaches even the allegedly safe regions of the global North) *and* unevenly distributed (in that it will undoubtedly affect the poor and marginalized first and foremost) phenomenon.

While the novel effectively outlines these national, eco-systemic contradictions through its description of setting, the remainder of my analysis explores how the generic form of the bildungsroman grants such issues greater vibrancy, nuance, specificity, and political urgency, in particular through its ability to zoom into, out of, and across disparate spatial scales. Thus while the developmental dynamics of *The Water Knife* are somewhat different from the ones examined in Esty's work, this chapter examines how the figure of

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[79] Bacigalupi further sketches this necropolitical setting throughout the novel, noting in particular, the enforcement of citizen violence: "Angel caught glimpses of militias: the sun-flash of high-power scopes tracking … all of them doing their bit to keep refugees from swamping their fragile promised land" (81); "The offer was simple: work, money, water—life. Stop shooting at Vegas and start shooting at Zoners. If they yoked themselves to the purposes of the Southern Nevada Water Authority, all things were possible" (81); "Militia's sprang up on the border, perched along the shoulder of the Colorado River, looking across the waters toward Arizona and Utah. Scalps appeared as warning signs along interstates. Chain gangs of Zoners and Merry Perrys marched back down into the river and told to swim for the other side" (81-2).

youth remains a potent symbol for reckoning with society's continued adjustment to a hyper-capitalist and neo-imperialist system, especially once this system has met its material limits.

When Maria is first introduced in the novel, we are confronted with her desire to integrate into the hyper-exploitative political and economic system that controls the access to and distribution of water in the parched Southwest. The novel explores this desire by way of several tropes typical to the bildungsroman genre, such as her education as an orphan.[80] One of her first educational scenes, for example, centers on a series of conversations with Toomie, a pupusa seller who acts as an adoptive father-figure for Maria throughout the novel. Maria's conversations with Toomie expose her to the intricacies of operating a water-distribution "business"—what is later referred to as her "liquid empire"—on the edge of Arcology construction site (95). From Toomie, she learns the importance of constructing a business model built upon the premise of "customer satisfaction"— a strategic management system in which company resources are employed so as to increase the loyalty of customers. Bacigalupi elaborates on Toomie's financial approach when he writes, "Whatever the customer wanted. That was [Toomie's] mantra. He'd sell *pupusas* in English, Spanish, or Chinese. He liked to say that if Klingons came down from space and landed, he'd learn that language, too. Toomie made people into regulars" (88). Maria adopts this model as her own for her water business, making sure she knows how to "count to one thousand [in Chinese] and write characters, too" (36).[81] In her attempts to learn how to properly function within

[80] The bildungsroman genre traditionally features an orphan as the protagonist.
[81] Bacigalupi describes Maria's learning process as follows: "Maria had been learning Chinese. She could count to one thousand and write characters, too. *Yi, er san, si wu, liu, chi, ba*… she'd been learning the tones. She'd been learning as fast as she could from the disposable tablets that the Chinese passed out to anyone who asked" (36).

this hegemonic global order, Maria thus reveals how late global capitalism is more than just a set of economic policies, but also a project for a new model of subjectivity that amounts to an (unsustainable) rearticulation of Adam Smith's *homo economicus* (187).[82] [83]

Toomie's financial ingenuity also models the value of "Location. Location. Location" for his young protégé.[84] Taking advantage of the improvisatory nature of his business, Toomie strategically chooses to situate his pupusa stand close to an Arcology construction site, which allows him to "grab workers changing shifts" and also cater to wealthy "fivers" living in the completed sections of the arcology. Seeing the economic sense in this decision, Maria later asks Toomie if she might sell water beside him in order to tap into his market: she offers "to split a little back in return for the chance to earn for herself. She'd do all the buying and hauling, and he wouldn't have to, and he'd still get a cut" (89). In this scene of instruction, Maria's eagerness to learn and master the managerial strategies for establishing her water-selling business resonate with what Tobias Boes calls the "normative" ideals of the classical bildungsroman, in which the protagonist accepts and eventually embodies the social order to a degree of unification where the distinction between individual choice and ideological compulsion is indistinguishable. In these early moments, the novel thus demonstrates the optimistic possibilities of individual's integration into a capitalist order (Moretti 16). The looming presence of the Arcology sites—which are described as utopian

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[82] In her analysis of scale and finance, Laura Finch argues that fiction enables us to see how financial narrative "dry up" with "the creative imagination of the protagonist whose ingenuity makes money" (388).

[83] For further examinations on the literary depiction of homo economicus, see Michelle Chihara's article "Behavioral Economics and Genre."

[84] Toomie encapsulates his business model with the follow advice for Maria: "Smile and style, Maria. A few kind words in the customer's home language, good food, reliable, and always on your spot. No exceptions. You're in business" (88).

infrastructures, designed to be completely sustainable housing complexes—serve as a constant reminder for Maria of the American dream she hopes to achieve.

Equally important to Maria's education are her interactions with Michael Ratan, a "senior hydrology specialist, Ibis Ltd.," who she meets through her friend, Sarah.[85] While Maria's scenes with Toomie focus on the managerial aspects of operating a water-selling business, her conversations with Ratan explore the hydrological systems that the Southwestern portion of the U.S. has historically relied upon for its growth:

> He told Maria how the Earth held hundreds of millions of gallons of water deep underground. Ancient water that had seeped down into it when glaciers melted. He'd described this world to Maria, hands darting, outlining geological strata, sandstone formations, talking about Halliburton drill soundings, telling her about aquifers. … Whole huge underground lakes. Of course they were almost pumped dry by now, but long ago there had been vast amounts of water down there. (44)

As the passage continues, Maria learns about much more than the geologic or "ancient" origins of the Southwest's hydroscape: Ratan informs her of the various extractive, hydraulic technologies (such as drilling and fracking) utilized by corporations for accessing hard-to-reach water, and he tells her of the large-scale and extensive infrastructure, known as the CAP (the Central Arizona Project), that has been engineered by the Arizona state government.[86] According to Ratan, the CAP "pumps water up out of the Colorado River and brings it three hundred miles across the desert to Phoenix," further transforming the Colorado from a powerful stream into a dispersed and brachiating resource-distribution system (45).[87]

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[85] In fact, Maria meets Ratan through Sarah, who works as a sex-worker in the Arcologies. She is hired by Ratan for her services.

[86] The Central Arizona Project is a 336-mile diversion canal in Arizona. It was created by the Colorado River Basin Project Act of 1968.

[87] Water Rights in the western U.S. follow prior appropriation doctrine, which gives a water right to whoever first puts water to beneficial use. Colorado, where the prior appropriation doctrine first developed, was generally looked to as the model by other Western states that

While Maria is obviously enamored by Ratan's wealth of knowledge, it is important to note that Ratan's "lesson" is grounded in and participates in reproducing a transcendent, managerial perspective—what Donna Haraway has called the "God trick." According to Haraway, the epistemological position of the "God's eye view" (or what she elsewhere refers to as "the conquering gaze from nowhere") has been especially troubling for environmentalist discourse, in particular because of its tendency to place the human knower in a position above and beyond worldly entanglements in order to "objectively" map and maintain "resources" for some abstract global human subject.[88] We see this perspective at play in much of Ratan's language, which situates the Colorado River within an anthropocentric and technocratic framework. His map of Arizona depicts the CAP as a "blue line" that was "straight as a ruler": "It bent a few times, but it lay on the land as if someone had sliced the desert with an X-Acto blade" (45-45). As he zooms around the map, showing Maria the CAP's path to Phoenix, he explains that ""The CAP is Arizona's IV drip … The aquifers around here are all pumped to hell. But Phoenix still has a pulse because of the CAP"' (45). In these instances, the river is framed as a tool (or even a toy) for Ratan and other hydro-engineers, who shrink its scope and dynamism in order to render it more suitable for human manipulation and profit (hence its description as an "IV drip"). This top-down, managerial approach has long been deployed by "hydraulic societies," which develop "coercive, monolithic, and hierarchical system[s]" for urban development in water-scarce

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adopted the prior appropriation doctrine. Water law in the western United States is defined by state constitutions (e.g., Colorado, New Mexico), statutes, and case law. Each state exhibits variations upon the basic principles of the prior appropriation doctrine. This is in contrast to the riparian doctrine, which is followed by most eastern states in the U.S.

[88] Haraway contends that "feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. In this way we might become answerable for what we learn how to see" (575).

spaces (Worster 7).[89] And, unfortunately, it becomes the perspective that Maria slowly adopts as she spends further time with Ratan.

Maria's educational storyline culminates in an important scene in which she secures a cache of water for later distribution. Her ability to procure this commodity is linked to her relationship with Ratan, who also introduces her to the economic concept of market pricing. He explains: "It's the market price, girl. The price on the pump right here is all about how much water is down underground. When it gets low, the price goes up so people will slow down and not take so much. When the aquifer gets full, the price goes down because they're not so worried about running out" (46). Understanding this pricing dynamic allows Maria to purchase water at exceptionally low rates—rates that only occur when large-scale vertical farms suddenly stop pumping water in order to dry out (and thus safely store) their harvest. These falling rates occur, Ratan explains, because when the vertical farms refrain from using water, "they do it all at once, so it fools the water-level monitors. Makes them think there's enough water for everyone, so then sometimes the price [drops]" (46). Drawing upon this insider information, Maria waits for an unexpected price-drop, and when it occurs, she invests all her cash (and her friend Sarah's as well) into securing the "surplus" water from the distribution pumps: "It was lower than she'd ever seen. Maria began shoving bills into the slot, locking prices as they kept falling. … She kept jamming in bills. It was almost like buying futures" (48). Having successfully played the system, Maria departs from the filling

[89] Bacigalupi employs a top-down perspective several times throughout the novel, anchoring such a perspective in the viewpoint of powerful characters in the novel such as Catherine Case and Angel (they are often featured in helicopters or rooftops, literally looking down upon the cities of Phoenix and Las Vegas).

station, thrilled with having found a secure place in the symbolic order of modernity and with her ability to shore up "futures" for herself and Sarah (Moretti).[90]

Unfortunately for Maria, this moment of successful growth and integration proves fleeting—and it precipitates the breakdown of the bildungsroman plot in the novel. After a lucrative first day of selling water to construction workers alongside Toomie's pupusa stand, two "enforcers" confront Maria and demand that she pay tax for selling on "land that ain't yours" (95). Although Maria has already paid the property tax, her status as a climate refugee undercuts her political agency, exposing her to predacious characters who also live in the novel's informal settlements. Maria eventually pays the two men, and in a sobering moment, comes to terms with the impossibility of successful development and vocational fulfillment: "She surveyed her water, trying to do the new math in her head. Figuring how much she owed Sarah, how much she owed for rent. She wanted to cry. All that planning, getting the intelligence on vertical farms—*it all came to nothing*. Maybe even less than nothing, if Sarah wouldn't split the loss with her" (96, emphasis mine). Her developmental narrative ultimately, then, gives an aesthetic form to what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the endless "not yet" (the permanent deferral of self-rule and self-possession) of neo-imperial design and Western historicism (8).

In place of her prior character growth, the remainder of Maria's narrative is characterized by a sort of subjective fossilization, which I call barren life. This term builds upon Georgio Agamben's understanding of "bare life" in order to theorize the difficulties faced by climate refugees under the conditions of anthropogenic climate change. As my reading illustrates, barren life emphasizes and elucidates the climatological dimensions of

[90] For more on this, see Randy Martin's "Financialization of Everyday Life," which discusses the role of risk and debt within depictions of human intimacy.

sovereign and necropolitical violence that come to predominate Maria's narrative in the novel, highlighting how drought, specifically, yields a form of life that is stunted and desiccated on both a symbolic and material level. The novel's depiction of barren life, in other words, illustrates how the weather itself becomes both an excuse and a tool for the further imposition of state violence upon climate refugees, making a nation's subjects "unseasonable" in a meteorological as well as metaphorical sense.

Before elaborating on the concept of barren life, I'd like to foreground some of the key points of Agamben's work as they relate to my project. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben develops a theory of marginalization based on the premise that modernity's exceptions (those who live on the margins of social, political, juridical and biological representation) predicate its social structure and political reasoning. The paradigmatic figure of that exceptionalism in historical terms is "homo sacer," an obscure figure of Roman law who, although once a citizen, is reduced to "bare life" by sovereign decree and deprived of basic rights such as representation before the law (and can thus be violated or killed with impunity). Homo sacer, the sacred and therefore separate man, is for Agamben, the emergent figure for our times; a time in which we are witnessing the effective resurfacing of sovereign forms of power and the concomitant production of bare life as a constituent element in the democratic order. For Agamben, homo sacer is the individual whose bios (political life) has been stripped or suspended, reducing them to an expendable and wounded state of life that is closer to—though not precisely the same as—zoe (bare, naked life). To illustrate how this dynamic operates in the present day, Agamben turns to the space of the Nazi concentration camp (which he describes as a space of exception), where juridical life and bare life enter into a "state of indistinction."

According to Agamben, the figure that most powerfully exemplifies the reduced status of bare life is the refugee. Importantly, however, the refugee is also exceptional for the way they expose the fiction of national sovereignty and all associated legal and political categories such as "people," "public," "human rights" and "citizen." He writes,

> If refugees (whose number has continued to grow in our century, to the point of including a significant part of humanity today) represent such a disquieting element in the order of the modern nation-state, this is above all because by breaking the continuity between man and citizen, nativity and nationality they put the originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis. (131)

In exposing the fiction of national sovereignty, the refugee also reveals how the category of human has become an "intentional collection" characterized by the unifying and reducible principles of citizenship. The consequence of this insight is that there is no longer any room for merely being alive, which Agamben understands as the most elementary characteristic of any living being. Rather, life is consequently absorbed into abstract variables (such as the "nation-state" or "society" or "citizen" and so forth). From this perspective, human rights turn out to be the property of citizens (and thus not applicable to refugees), rather than genuinely universal.

As the novel's avatar for the figure of the climate refugee, Maria's stalled and barren narrative showcases the operations of bare life in the novel, but complicates it by contextualizing it within a drought-stricken, dystopian world. We can take her interactions with "the Vet," the man who owns and runs the slum that she and Sarah live in, as a useful starting point for examining this dynamic. In the novel, the Vet is described as a Judge Holden like figure: "He was solidly built. A bull of a man, with thick shoulders and a shock of white hair and blue eyes" (130). Like Holden, he possesses a supernatural quality, resembling "a demon, climbed out of the earth. Some kind of creature that ate and ate and ate" (130). For Maria, the Vet thus embodies the nation's tendency to greedily consume

environmental "resources" at unsustainable rates. His raced and gendered dimensions reflect, on a symbolic level, the type of individual most responsible for the climatic conditions that plague Maria's world.

Even more importantly, the Vet's specific targeting of Maria (and other climate refugees) speaks to the state's tendency to prey upon radically disenfranchised communities in order to satiate and sustain its developmental drive. We see this through the Vet's promise to sneak Maria across the border ("to earn her way across the river") if she makes him enough cash —an act that capitalizes of her liminal position as a climate refugee. He knows, in other words, that as a citizen of a state that no longer exists due to the disastrous consequences of mega-drought, she has no political heft or legal recourse; her only chance at survival relies upon recovering her subjectivity in the eyes of the state and in escaping the drought conditions of an ailing Arizona. Maria underscores the perilous quality of this situation when she observes that "[t]here was no doubt that if she didn't make rent he'd toss her out, or drain her blood and black-market it, or sell her ass to make up his quota..." (76). The Vet's parasitic relationship with Maria thus showcases how capitalist development goes hand in hand with exploitative labor practices, local community destruction, and environmental degradation.

Maria's insight in this moment (that the Vet would "drain her blood and black-market it") also adds a disturbing twist to Jason Moore's work on resource exhaustion and the "end of cheap nature." In *Capitalism and the Web of Life*, Moore argues that the "Capitalocene"—through its exhaustion of the appropriation of the work/energy of "extra-human natures" (in this case, it is the Colorado River)—necessarily signals the end of "cheap nature" (285). In Bacigalupi's dark vision of a drought-stricken Southwest, climate refugees literally replenish the exhausted aqua-systems that precede climate collapse; they become, in

other words, the new frontier (the "cheap nature") through which capitalist violence, with its expansionary frontier movement, operates and revives itself. From this perspective, the drought catalyzes an illicit market in which blood replaces water as a source of hydration and energy. The drought, in this sense, enhances an extractive logic in which the inhuman subject—the climate refugee—must re-energize the developmental logics of a racist geosocial matrix.[91] And the intimacy of this violent act speaks to ways in which the Anthropocene, as a geological era, is founded on innumerable "scenes of subjection," many of which are left out of accounts of this era's origin story (Hartman).

The novel's depiction of Maria's domesticity adds further texture to the concept of barren life. Like the concentration camps in Agamben's exposition, the "disaster barrio" that Maria resides in can be read as a "zone of indistinction," where recourse to the law is not only suspended, but the political legitimacy of bare life is brought to a fatal and sustained crescendo. The disaster barrios take shape in abandoned housing developments: they feature no electricity, no running water, and no arable land. Climate refugees live in these inhospitable environments "crammed together like sardines," constantly fearing the arrival of the Vet's enforcers, who threaten them with violence and extortion (39). These conditions expose Maria to a quality of life typical to the "(post)colonial slum," where "the usual benefits of urban life such as employment, legality, and shelter cannot be relied on" (Barnard 281).

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[91] This scene also literalizes Andrew Apter's discussion of state vampirism in Nigeria. According to Apter, "state vampirism" describes the way in which the Nigerian state, and those corrupt bureaucrats who allegedly operated in its interests, preyed upon the people they claimed to serve, funneling vast amounts of money and resources into the hands of a "neocolonial elite" (143). In the novel, water, rather than oil, figures as the desired resource; in water's absence, it is blood.

Yet what renders this living arrangement even more dangerous is Maria's consistent exposure to the drought and its massive, tsunami-like sandstorms. Unlike other characters in the novel, such as Lucy or Angel, who are able to afford living in drought-conditions through the purchase of REI-brand "grit goggles" and "filter masks," Maria's barren life is characterized by a violent exposure to the sand and dust that suffuse Arizona's arid atmosphere. In narrating the typical start to her day in the disaster barrio, Bacigalupi writes, "[s]he coughed into her hands. Last night's storm had messed with her chest more than usual, bits of dust burying themselves deep in the dead-end branches of her lungs. She was coughing up blood and mucus again. More and more, the blood was a common thing that they never spoke about" (38). The dust in this passage is so pervasive that it penetrates the biological fabric of Maria's body, burying itself in her lungs, which Bacigalupi describes as desiccated trees. Here the violence of neo-colonial extraction returns to haunt the nation-state, yet the passage highlights how people of color are most likely to absorb the shock of ecological degradation: the Anthropocene "is predicated on the presumed absorbent qualities of black and brown bodies to take up the burdens of exposure to toxicities and to buffer the violence of the earth" (Yusoff, Preface).

Through Maria's focal point, Bacigalupi illustrates a dreary vision of life for the climate refugee. In particular, her storyline reflects the racial and social issues that inflect critical and legal debates about climate refugeeism, a category that remains currently unrecognized by the international legal framework set by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, which states that a refugee is any person who, "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality…" (CR, 15). Nevertheless, Maria—as a queer woman and person of color—indexes the intersectional

social groups most susceptible to climate damage. WEDO (the Women's Environment and Development Organization), which focuses on climate change, corporate accountability, and governance, charges that gender, "a critical aspect of climate change," "remains largely on the outskirts" of climate conversations (WEDO. Enforced gender inequality reduces physical and economic mobility, voice, and opportunity in many places, making women more vulnerable to mounting environmental stresses. Moreover, WECAN (Women's Earth and Climate Action Network) points out that "Indigenous women, women from low-income communities, and women from the Global South bear an even heavier burden from the impacts of climate change because of the historic and continuing impacts of colonialism, racism and inequality" (WECAN). In many cases, this is exacerbated by that fact that these groups are "more reliant upon natural resources for their survival and/or live in areas that have poor infrastructure." Maria's narrative provocatively animates and foregrounds these issues, so often overlooked in political and legal discourse, allowing readers to grasp how race, gender, class, and climate intertwine like some sociological double-helix.

Despite the prevailing conditions of barrenness that come to characterize Maria's narrative, the novel concludes by reinserting the question of futurity into its narrative framework. This interest in futurity is explored in the closing scene of the novel, which depicts a last-ditch effort on Maria's part to jumpstart her barren life— an act that would also resuscitate the plot of her disrupted bildungsroman. In this final scene, Angel and Lucy—the novel's two other protagonists—are heatedly debating what to do with the finally-procured water rights, a set of documents that determines which state will own and control access to the ever-diminishing water supply of the Colorado River. Lucy believes that the water rights should be turned over to the city of Phoenix, which would save Arizona from collapse by "mov[ing] the suffering elsewhere, [to Nevada]" (365). Angel, on the other

hand, wants to turn the rights over to his boss, Catherine Case ("the Queen of the Colorado"), in order to regain his employer's trust and save the city of Las Vegas, which he intends to live in. The debate comes to an unexpected conclusion when Lucy betrays Angel by pulling a gun on him and riding off on an electric bike.

Yet just as Lucy makes her escape, Maria, draws a hidden firearm and shoots Lucy in the back. In the wake of this violent act, Maria reflects on the callousness of her act:

> She thought maybe she was supposed to feel worse that this woman was suffering, but she didn't, and it made her wonder about herself. She wondered if something was broken inside her now, with all the things she'd said and done, but in the end she couldn't make herself care about that, either. All she could think about was that she was going to cross the river … where everyone lived inside huge gleaming arcologies where they didn't suck dust and burn all day long. (370)

In the end, Maria's desire to live an unbarren life outweighs the violence that accompanies processes of unsustainable growth and development. In fact, the novel hints at the reignition of her character growth by having Toomie observe that she's becoming the new Catherine Case, the new "Queen of the Colorado." Maria's future, in other words, consists of perpetuating the old models of development that have destroyed the Southwest's ecology and created the conditions of a never-ending mega-drought.

From this perspective, *The Water Knife* attempts to escape the strictures and tracks of developmentalism (and it highlights the necessity of derailing this trajectory), but remains unsure of how—or even if—escape is possible. The novel thus ends in suspense, with its characters awaiting the imminent, but not-yet fulfilled, arrival of Catherine Case and her crew. Such an open-ended conclusion to the text thus resists the foreclosed, predetermined conclusions of western modernity, and pushes back against prognostications of inevitable doom for our world's unimagined communities. In doing so, the text leaves these questions and issues to be picked up, re-examined, and carried forward by others who seek to resist the teleology of modernity and the march of progress. With this thought in mind, I now turn

toward a novel that engages with many of these same themes, yet which reaches a significantly different conclusion.

—Part II—

Enduring Drought: Geontologies of Power in Wright's Speculative Australia

Similar to the Southwestern portion of the United States, much of Australia has been facing a searing, long-term drought. According to research published in the journal *Nature Geoscience*, human activity is largely to blame for the increased decline in fall and winter rainfall across the continent, which has led to the onset of unprecedented drought conditions (beginning in the 1970s), which have worsened over the last four decades.[92] The severity of Australia's drying-out has wilted crops, threatened livestock, and resulted in devastating heatwaves, leading Australia's former prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, to remark, "Now we are the land of droughts." Bearing the brunt of this unnatural disaster most directly are the country's farmers and Aboriginal communities, whose ways of life are directly threatened by drought's growing encroachment on the land and its rivers.[93] As "ecosystem people," both groups are "dependent for their survival on the seasonal cycles of adjoining [environments]" (Nixon 151). Farmers, for example, have endured the mass failure

[92] A study on drought in Australia, "Human Activity Has Caused Long-term Australian Drought, Model Shows" by Yale Environment 360 proports: "Rises in greenhouse gas emissions and thinning of the ozone hole have led to changes in large-scale atmospheric circulation, including a poleward movement of the westerly winds and increasing atmospheric surface pressure over parts of southern Australia. This has led to decreased rainfall. The drying is most severe over southwest Australia, where the model forecasts a 40 percent decline in average rainfall by the late 21st century, with significant implications for regional water resources."

[93] Further information on this issue can be found here: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/30/world/australia/drought-farmers-new-south-wales.html
And here: https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/jan/25/when-the-river-runs-dry-the-australian-towns-facing-heatwave-and-drought

of the crops and the die-off of their cattle, causing bankruptcy and heavy reliance on government subsidies. Aboriginal peoples, on the other hand, have been largely excluded from conversations pertaining to water distribution and management, even on lands for which they hold native title.

Waanyi author, Alexis Wright, has spent decades working in the area of land rights and legal advocacy across northern Australia, examining the realities of land dispossession and environmental degradation from an aboriginal vantage.[94] Since the mid-1970s, she has worked with numerous indigenous activist groups, and she has helped develop social policy that advocates for aboriginal land rights and self-determination. As a writer and activist, she is accomplished in multiple genres, including both academic and historical nonfiction. In her Mabo Lecture, at AIATSIS, Wright explains that the fight for aboriginal sovereignty is battle that takes place on the terrain of narrative: "We are in the middle of a storytelling war aimed at the destruction of our rights" (Wright).[95] Wright goes on to underscore the importance of storytelling for aboriginal people by explaining that "our future requires us to become very mindful about preserving and rebuilding our oral tradition of good and skillful storytelling practice."

This focus on stories and storytelling sparked a shift within her own style of advocacy: in her late forties, Wright started writing fiction as a way to explore and communicate these concerns. Her first novel, *Plains of Promise* (1997), gives voice to the children and mothers who were torn apart as a consequence of the "stolen generations,"

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[94] Wright was extensively involved in several Aboriginal government departments and agencies as a professional manager, educator, researcher, and writer. She's contributed greatly to the cause of social justice for Aboriginal people, including involvement in the 1998 Kalkaringi contentions over Northern Territory statehood.

[95] An annual conference by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

when government and church agents effectively kidnapped indigenous children with the aim of assimilating them into white society. *Carpentaria* (2006), which won Australia's pre-eminent literary prize, the Miles Franklin Award in 2007, depicts the marginalization of indigenous people by the twin powers of the sovereign state and global capitalism, against the backdrop of a multinational mining corporation that ignores indigenous land rights. In this novel, Wright traces the interconnected stories of several inhabitants of the fictional town of Desperance (focusing in particular on the fraught relationships between three men: Norm and Will Phantom, and Mozzie Fishman), situated on the Gulf of Carpentaria in northwest Queensland.

In her most recent novel, *The Swan Book* (2014), it is climate change—and, in particular, the unnatural disaster of drought—that takes center stage. *The Swan Book* takes place in an eco-dystopian future, set about 100 years into the future.[96] The novel focuses on two youthful protagonists—Oblivia Ethelyne and Warren Finch—and traces how each responds to, shapes, and is shaped by the ecological and colonial crisis that surrounds them.

In this bleakly envisioned future, the planet is engulfed by climatological catastrophe and political turmoil. Replacing the dominant vision of a stereotypically maternal and benevolent "Mother Earth," we instead encounter "Mother Catastrophe": "Mother Nature? Hah! […] People on the road called her Mother Catastrophe of flood, fire, drought, and blizzard. These were the four seasons which she threw around the world whenever she liked" (5). The ex-centric weather conditions of this climate-changed world incite global warfare, economic collapse, and a planetary refugee crisis. And as the weather conditions

[96] Several articles have examined the complex temporalities of Wright's fiction. In *The Swan Book,* in particular, time is depicted as slippery and non-linear. Daniel Fisher notes that "In Wright's book, the future and the past spin around one another so rapidly that readers might easily lose track of up and down, backward and forward" (181).

become increasingly destabilized, geopolitical power dynamics shift and flip: inhabitants of the once-powerful global North (now frozen over and contaminated by nuclear warfare) flee to the global South, where weather conditions are equally catastrophic, yet at least allow for the possibility of human inhabitation and survival. Their refuge, more specifically, comes in the shape of aboriginal land in northern Australia.[97]

Like *Carpentaria*, the majority of *The Swan Book* is loosely set in Waanyi Country, along the southwest coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, straddling the Northern Territory and western Queensland. While this region of the country was once a healthy, riverine ecosystem, mega-drought (in the world of the novel) has transformed it into a polluted and stagnant swamp: "Sandstorms continued pouring over the lake and turned it into a swamp. The sand flew about in this freak weather until it banked up into a mountain with a pointy peak reaching into the sky. The mountain blocked the channel leading from the sea to the swamp" (11). Anthropogenic drought, in other words, transforms the "lake people" into "swamp people" people, pointing to how the colonially-infused dynamics of climate change often interfere with long-standing indigenous world-views based on interdependence and cross-generational continuity (22).

Adding to this troubling situation is the fact of the state-sanctioned military intervention, which further transmogrifies the lake into an inhospitable environment. After taking control of the swamp, the military transforms it into a settlement detention settlement bounded by razor wire. Even though the Aboriginal community that Wright depicts has native claim to the land that they reside on, the narrative illustrates how governmental

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[97] Wright's depiction of the global North as the source for climate refugees enacts the Comaroff's contention that, in a neoliberal world order, the global North may be "evolving" into the kind of societies normally associated with the global South.

policies find ways to override or work around indigenous land titles, leading to new articulations of dispossession and colonial governance. In fact, such treatment of Australian Aboriginal communities contains clear echoes of Australia's history of state interference into Aboriginal affairs, including the 2007 Northern Territory National Emergency Response, informally called "the intervention," which saw the Australian national army take possession of seventy-three Aboriginal communities on grounds, subsequently disproved, of widespread child abuse and neglect (Takolander 115).[98] If this situation weren't dire enough, the Army then uses the swamp as a site for releasing "test" bombs and as a dumping ground for "disposing" of waste.

Similarly to *The Water Knife*, Wright's narrative deploys the individual as a cipher for exploring these extensive settler-colonial histories and large-scale eco-systemic issues. Wright herself comments on this approach when she comments, during an interview with Jane Gleeson, that she wanted to develop a protagonist who served as "a reflection on Aboriginal communities." What's more, Wright also notes that this involved crafting a character who lives in a state of perpetual stasis: "With Oblivia, I wanted a character who, in a way, is unable to grow up. … Aboriginal communities [remain] unable to grow up if we keep on being shackled by policy and by other people's ideas of how we should be. But I also wanted to demonstrate how we maintain an idea of sovereignty of the mind, even if we haven't got sovereignty of the country or the land." Wright's commentary here, which forges links between "Oblivia," a large-scaled contingency of "Aboriginal communities," and the first-

[98] The novel's depiction of hostility towards refugees might also be read as a critical commentary on the Australian state's current antipathy toward immigrants, refugees, and racial minorities. The novel's mixed temporality (which flashes between past and future) ironizes these xenophobic sentiments by highlighting how Australia was itself colonized by settlers who arrived from elsewhere.

person plural "we," gestures toward the scalar maneuverability that the bildungsroman genre deftly performs—a scalar maneuverability vital for the depiction of the amorphous slow violence of mega-drought. With this context in mind, the remainder of this essay attends to Wright's complex depiction of Oblivia as a figure of unseasonable youth, one whose unseasonability stems from settler-colonial violence and its manifestation of/in anthropogenic drought.

Throughout the novel, Oblivia is consistently characterized by her youthful, unaged appearance. On numerous occasions, for example, Wright describes her as an "eternal child," "liv[ing] in a limbo world" (71).[99] And the narrator at one point notes that despite the best efforts of Oblivia's care-taker, Aunty Bella Donna of the Champions,[100] the promise or potential for "development" in a traditionally Western sense is flatly rebuffed:

> The old woman was trying to make good use of her burden, whose aim in life was to get the girl to act normal: behave and sit up straight at the table and use a knife and fork properly, learn table manners, talk nicely, walk as a butterfly flies, dress like a normal person, learn something marvelous on a daily basis, and show some resilience. … It seemed as though Oblivia had learnt nothing in years of living with the old woman except how to stay bent and rake thin. (18)[101]

Oblivia thus remains a figure of un-development throughout the novel. Buy why is Oblivia "unable to grow up"? What developmental dynamics hinder her "successful" maturation?

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[99] It's unclear how much time passes in the novel, but the narrator suggests that Oblivia's story spans at least a decade. Nevertheless, Oblivia is consistently referred to as "the girl" throughout the novel.

[100] Aunty Bella Donna is a European climate refugee who "discovers" Oblivia in the roots of a eucalyptus tree. She tells Oblivia about swan-lore from a European context.

[101] Leela Gandhi argues that, particularly within a postcolonial context, the bildungsroman "can also be read as an intensely conservative discourse of socialization; one which aims to achieve the symbolic legitimation of authority. Indeed, it could be argued that far from encouraging individual autonomy, Bildung gestures toward a pedagogic ideal that promotes a subtle internalization of the law within its bourgeois pupils" (59).

And what settler-colonial histories and neo-imperial structures render her a figure of barren life within the novel?

Crucially, Wright ties this barren, suspended condition to a moment of traumatic violence: Oblivia's rape. Depictions of rape within cultural production must, of course, be treated with care and sensitivity. In part this is because, as Sharon Marcus notes, a (male-female) rape act "imposes as well as presupposes misogynist inequalities; rape is not only scripted, it also scripts" (391).[102] Marcus's point here is not to equate reading or writing about rape with experiencing rape, but to highlight the material implications of a text: rape narratives inevitably intersect with cultural rape scripts, which ultimately generate and perpetuate the act of rape itself. Further contributing to this complex representational question is the fact that the parallel rape of women and the earth has become a stock ecological motif.[103] Stacy Alaimo elaborates on the overlapping feminization of nature and the naturalization of women in her book *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space:*

> In a dauntingly impermeable formulation, woman is not only constituted as nature, but nature is invoked to uphold the propriety of this very constitution. … The dual meanings of nature converge at the site of woman, fixing her in a vortex of circular arguments: woman is closer to nature and is thus inferior; woman is inferior because nature has made her so. (2-3)

For Alaimo, the sexualization of male conquest and colonialism naturalizes these rapacious processes; and, moreover, the feminization of landscape has endorsed the exploitation of

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[102] For more on this topic, see Wendy Hersford's essay "Rape Stories" which examines what she calls the "rape script," which denotes those dominant cultural discourses that "presume women's passivity, helplessness, and desire to be raped" (13). See also, Sujata Moorti's *Color of Rape: Gender and Race in Television's Public Spheres*.

[103] For more on this subject, see Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* and J.M. Coetzee's *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee*, which reflects on the rape of indigenous women by colonial settlers in South Africa.

"natural resources" by promoting an ideology of power over nature and a methodology of penetration. Women, the land, and indigenous peoples, Alaimo explains, are thus depicted as "mysterious zones" that invite their own violation. Taking such concerns and insights into consideration, it becomes crucial to reflect on why Wright includes this instance of sexual violence within her novel.[104]

Throughout the course of *The Swan Book*, we learn that Oblivia was raped by a gang of local boys, "who thought they were men, [who] were wracked out of their minds on fumes from an endless supply of petrol, glue, or whatever else" (73). Aunty Bella Donna elaborates on the hideousness of this violent event by noting that Oblivia had "been gang-raped physically, emotionally, psychologically, statistically, randomly, historically, so fully in fact: *Your time stands still*" (72).[105] Bella Donna's adverb-intensive account of the rape highlights Australia's cultural, settler-colonial, and political histories—histories that infuse and animate this violent moment. Moreover, the disparate scales of the causes and effects of Oblvia's rape (her "emotional" damage, for example, is linked with the statistical and historical) point to the scalar variability that the bildungsroman offers as a literary genre. The rape, in this sense, serves as a synecdoche for the violation of Aboriginal country, people, and ontology. The novel further explores and complicates this issue by explicitly correlating the crime with state mistreatment and mismanagement of Aboriginal youth: the narrator

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[104] Donna Haraway also effectively speaks to this issue: "Theoretical works in social movements is often done thought figuration—through imagining powerful cultural figures." Her words help us understand that in a cultural context in which feminized tropes of nature seem unlikely to vanish, we need to understand the political entanglements and the potential force of specific metaphors.

[105] The narrator further elaborates on Oblivia's stunted age, linking it directly to her rape: "not being able to speak of why she was waking up screaming and frightened of the darkness, and of being so petrified that she would be eternally connected to the age she had been just before she had been rape..." (73).

notes that the boys were "given a fresh start by a youth worker" and a "largesse to close the gap of failed policies for Aboriginal advancement from the Government in Canberra" (84). Wright's depiction of Oblivia's rape thus effectively grapples with unequal power dynamics and the toxic, colonial ideologies that saturate rape-culture in Aboriginal communities.

The repercussions of this act only proliferate. After Bella Donna finally discovers a traumatized Oblivia, the narrator explains that her first goal is to reunite the lost girl with her parents. To Bella Donna's surprise, however, the parents reject the possibility of a reunion: they "whispered to Bella Donna to *shut up*. They had long since finished, *windjibi* with grieving after accepting a plausible inquest report and had never expected to see their child again" (76). Moreover, the novel connects Oblivia's discovery to the "unearthing of sad old stories" and "new tracks of possibilities" for settler-colonial violence (74). From this perspective, the novel suggests that previous experiences of state intervention and bureaucratic interference are so extreme and disruptive that Obilvia's parents are willing to forego the chance of reconnecting with their lost daughter in order to avoid the possibility of future heartbreak. As a consequence of such details in the novel, most criticism tends to understand Oblivia's rape on a primarily metaphorical or allegorical level. Ben Holgate, for example, makes the case that Oblivia's rape "signifies the degree of dysfunction within her own community" (639). And Adeline Johns-Putra argues that Oblivia's violation "brings with it a rupture in time that is also expressive of a rupture in Aboriginal history—in other words, a transgression of its Dreamtime or cosmology" (34).[106] While these insights are inarguably an important part of Wright's political work, it is also necessary to acknowledge

[106] See also, "Untidy Times: Alexis Wright, Extinction, and the Politics of Apprehension" by Daniel Fisher.

the very *material* realities and concerns that are tied to this moment, and which have been thus far overlooked in analyses of this scene.

To unearth the material aspects caught up within this fraught representational terrain, I want to turn to Kathyrn Yusoff's work in *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None,* which offers a helpful analytic for understanding the implications and complexities of (male-female) sexual violence within *The Swan Book*. In her text, Yusoff theorizes what she terms the "Black Anthropocene":

> Another way to conceive this would be to understand Blackness as a historically constituted and intentionally enacted deformation in the formation of subjectivity, a deformation that presses an inhuman categorization and the inhuman earth into intimacy. This contact point of geographical proximity with the earth was constructed specifically as a node of extraction of properties and personhood. … The proximity of black and brown bodies to harm in this intimacy with the inhuman is what I am calling Black Anthropocenes. It is an inhuman proximity organized by historical geographies of extraction, grammars of geology, imperial global geographies, and contemporary environmental racism.[107] (Preface)

According to Yusoff, Blackness—which serves as a shorthand for both African, Afro-diasporic, and non-African Indigenous communities—should be understood as a state of relation that is assigned to difference through a material colonial inscription, one which simultaneously enacted the cutting of geographical ties to land and attachments to ecologies. To help unpack this critical reorientation, Yusoff examines and then reconceptualizes the figure of the "Golden Spike." In Anthropocene discourse (for geologists and climate

[107] Yusoff explains that the animating logic of the Black Anthropocene is that of "White Geology," [which] "makes legible a set of extractions, from particular subject positions, from black and brown bodies, and from the ecologies of place. The collective functioning of geologic languages coded—inhuman, property, value, possession—as categories moves across territory, relation, and flesh. It is not just that geology is a signifier for extraction but that a transmutation of matter occurs within that signification that renders matter as property, that makes a delineation between agency and inertness, which stabilizes the cut of property and enacts the removal of matter from its constitutive relations as both subject and mineral embedded in sociological and ecological fields" (Chapter 1).

scientists, particularly), the search for the Golden Spike operates as a disciplinary endeavor to geologically map the material relation of space and time according to stratigraphic principles and scientific precedents. Most commonly, the scientific community offers three possible material beginnings for the Anthropocene subject: the Columbian "exchange" and "Orbis hypothesis" event (1610); the Industrial Revolution and James Watt's steam engine (1800); and the "Great Acceleration" and nuclear isotopes from missile testing (20th century).[108]

In contrast to this definition, however, Yusoff argues for a Golden Spike—an Anthropogenic "impaling"—that acknowledges the quotidian, inhuman social geologies that underpin these geologic origin points:

> Let's imagine for a moment, in the realm of a more exuberant and exacting social geology, that the Golden Spike is something that spikes or impales, that there is a flesh that underwrites this geology (human, nonhuman, inhuman). This corporeality is a way to visualize, to render sensible, to redress the social context and a contextual outside to that geology (where geology is never a formation only of materiality but also of time, and species and its twin race, explanation, and future politics). This contextual outside might be called the geotrauma of the Anthropocene's realization—a geotrauma where flesh is the medium of exchange that organizes and modifies the Spike. Geologic relations are always material relations of power… (Chapter 2)

Thus, Golden Spikes are simultaneously cultural edifices of political geology (when tied to the Orbis Hypothesis or steam engine) and testaments to extractive–racialized–industrialized complexes (when reframed to consider quotidian, racialized geo-violence). And to ignore the geologic relations that organize the Golden Spike, in fact, is to reproduce the ongoing violence of those relations.

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[108]For Yusoff, these origin points name—in an obscured or opaque manner—a "story about the very bodies that undo strata—the theft of bodies, of the flesh that hews the rock, that plants the sugar plantation, that blasts and gets blasted in the mines, that transports and carries the pathogens and pollutions of those Spikes as processes of destratifications"(Chapter 2).

Without question, we can—and should—read Oblivia's penetrative violation as one example of this colonial violence, as a moment that emphasizes the prevalence of the Anthropocene's quotidian and racialized "geotraumas." As such, her sexual assault is grounded in an imperial viewpoint that understands Aboriginal individuals, and women in particular, as less-than human, as inhuman objects.

The socio-geological underpinnings of this act are rendered even more apparent when the novel's other protagonist, Warren Finch, is introduced. I will shortly examine Warren's character and personal development in greater depth, but I introduce him here to examine how he enacts and dramatizes the racialized grammars of white geology. When Warren is introduced in the narrative, he is described in terms of universal adoration. The narrative forges a sense of connection with Warren by noting that "he really looked no different in appearance to anybody else living in the swamp" (106). He is described as a sort of fabulous cross between Barack Obama, Nelson Mandela, and Moses, and the narrator comments that "he was leading the development of new laws for the world on the protection of the earth and its peoples, after centuries of destruction on the planet" (110; 114). While the swamp people are in many ways isolated from the rest of Australia, they have "always kept up with the news about Warren. … Australia needed an original inhabitant on top of the political ladder and they liked that" (103). And when the community finally has the chance to meet him, the narrator observes that "This closeness of the *gift* was exciting. His relatives felt complete to be so close to his flesh and blood, and could breathe at last for having a precious belonging returned to the ordinariness of Country" (120).

However, Warren's introduction also betrays a sense of ambivalence. Even though "[the swamp people] liked the idea that Australia needed a blackfella to hide behind," they also resent the fact that they are expected to behave exactly like Warren, and they give voice

to a disdain for the respectability politics that often structure aboriginal acceptance and recognition. They ask, "*Why was the whole country telling us to become another Warren Finch?*" (112). What most concerns the Aboriginal community, though, is their remembrance that Warren's kin, the Brolga nation, released claim to their land in exchange for payment from the Australian government: "Warren Finch's Aboriginal Nation Government was just down the road, [they] had grown prosperous with *flukes of luck here and there called mining*, and saying yes, yes, yes, to anything on offer—a bit of assimilation, a bit of giving up your own sovereignty, a bit of closing the gap … (103-104, emphasis mine).[109] When the narrative shifts to Warren's own perspective, their distrust in his character is validated. Warren, the narrator explains, views the Swamp people as "abysmally slackassed" and "incompetent," and he considers their land to be "dismal" (132; 115). Because he finds the community so "off-putting," he wonders whether this community was "even worth saving at all"—a question that highlights his own inflated sense of self-importance (he's their Savior) and his condescension toward others (they are in need of saving) (133).[110]

During a meeting with the swamp's aboriginal elders, this feeling of mutual distrust comes to a head, and Warren's hidden motivations for his visit (he states he simply desires to claim his "promised wife") are addressed (133). The narrator reveals what the elders eventually realize: "They were not going to be duped by anyone walking in off the street so to speak, or more factually, coming in off the road like some unannounced hobo Black

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[109] The narrator's outlook on Warren is often largely ironic. With mock reverence, the narrator describes Warren as "the lost key. He was post-racial. Possibly even post-Indigenous. His sophistication had been far-flung and heaven-sent" (110).

[110] The narrator explains that Warren's favorite "place" in the world, was up in his commercial jet, zooming around the world. Through this reference, Wright (like Bacigalupi) links the god's eye view to political corruption, discourses of mastery, and earthly disengagement. 121 "Warren's life could

fellow, and aiming to rip the dirt from beneath their feet. […] *He was making a claim on their traditional land*" (136, emphasis mine). Warren responds to their intransigence by recourse to Aboriginal custom: "*The law is the law*. He simply wanted what was his to claim from an agreement made between families, of *Our nations*, he said" (136). Through Warren's response, Wright comments on how Aboriginal law has itself been repurposed and weaponized in a liberal state—by "a self-designated White Man, who hates Blacks"—to disenfranchise the communities it is designed to protect (103). And with this, Warren is taken to meet and wed an unassuming Oblivia.

It is no surprise, then, that the description of Warren's first encounter with Oblivia brims with language of predation and property acquisition—both of which are grammars of white geology. Upon reaching Oblivia's home (a rusted hull floating on the dust-filled lake), Warren imagines himself as "the hunter who captures a mythical swan maiden in a marsh" (139). He then further objectifies Oblivia by "look[ing] her up and down like a cattle buyer" (140). And he concludes his valuation of his wife-to-be by callously noting that, "*She looks deranged. Unhinged. She still acts like a child. But she must be about eighteen, nineteen, even twenty. What's wrong with her. She can't always be like this*"—an observation that once more emphasizes her barren, unseasonable state of being (140).[111]

Yet rather than express any genuine concern for Oblivia's well-being, Warren capitalizes (quite literally) on her barren life-state, using the shock of what Yusoff would call her "geo-trauma" to push their marriage forward and lay claim to her people's traditional homeland. Warren's maneuvers here vivify Yusoff's claim that coloniality enacts a reduced

[111] It's not clear whether or not Oblivia's rape render her physically barren. At one point, however, Warren notes that, because of her youthful appearance, "Even the act of consummating seemed a waste of time. When he looked at her all he saw was a child. You can't have sex—make love with a kid" (169).

vision of sociality, one which "cuts across both flesh and earth in the economies of valuation it established"; this gesture, in turn, deadens or "voids" subjectivity in order to reinvest it with the properties of extraction (Chapter 2). Within the framework of white geology, "Bodies become gold [or property, in this case], emptied of the sign of the human" and are separated from their continuity with the larger material assemblages that surround them (Chapter 2).[112] Warren's thought process here—which frames Oblivia as valuable only for her land—thus models a historical logic that was razed on the earth since the dawn of European arrival in the so-called "New World" and other allegedly uninhabited spaces, such as Australia and South Africa. For as Sylvia Wynter has argued, the colonial importance of the New World lies in its dual processes of the "reduction of Man to Labour and of Nature to Land under the impulsion of the market economy" (35). In *The Swan Book*, Warren's geologic optic reduces Oblivia to Wife/Property and her ancestral homeland to a sacrificial landscape.[113] Such moments in the novel, then, testify to Oblivia's transmutation into an unseasonable figure of aboriginal youth—on both a metaphorical and material level.

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[112] During a flashback later in the novel, Oblivia recalls the rape. In her account, land mixes with the human form in a way that recalls Stacy Alaimo's examination of the gendered landscape and the naturalized female figure: "The boys from long ago emerged from the ground. It had happened suddenly with the ground swelling and growing around her until she was covered in total darkness, but she knew them instantly, knew what they were doing—she had not killed them in her memory. She remembered their closeness to each other, in touch, smell, and breathing. Of being joined together with them as firmly as a ball of animals rolling over wet ground. She saw through them as they were falling in, over, above, coming through her in sepia-colored waves of brown, gray and red. They rolled in the desert wind over the surface of the land, and down the green and yellowing spinifex smothering the hillocks that role and fell into valleys of lily-colored skin, and over the distances of salt-marshes" (180).

[113] I refer here to the work of historian Brian Black. For Black, a sacrificial landscape is an area of land that must die so that another (usually urban and industrial) can thrive.

The extent to which Warren rejects alternative framings and understandings of Country[114] is cruelly demonstrated when he and Oblivia depart from the swamp. Taking note of Oblivia's unspoken attachment to the swamp and the swans that inhabit it, Warren decides to sever all her ties to place in order to emphasize the impossibility of her return. Making a quick call on his mobile phone, Warren "ordered the total evacuation of Swan Lake. The Army would do it. The whole shebang would be bulldozed that night. He imagined total annihilation. The swamp dredged" (145). Warren's decision to have the swamp destroyed points to his awareness of its significance from an Aboriginal perspective—and also his alliance with colonial practices bent on disrupting indigenous worldviews. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang put it, "the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence" (5). Land-based ontologies, like those of indigenous populations in northern Australia, emphasize the interdependence of humans and nonhumans in ecosystems (and they also register how humans and nonhumans have habituated themselves to *particular* ecosystems).[115] For many Aboriginal communities, like Oblivia's, the concept of interdependence includes a sense of identity associated with the environment and a sense of responsibility to care for the environment. In this worldview, there is no privileging of humans as unique in having agency or intelligence; one's identity and caretaking responsibility as a human includes the philosophy that nonhumans have their own agency, spirituality, knowledge, and intelligence.

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[114] Throughout this paper, I follow the practice of spelling Country with a capital "C," as is preferred by most Aboriginal scholars and Elders. Country cannot be reduced to landscape, rather it includes all living things: people, plants, non-human animals, rocks; it embraces the seasons, stories and creation spirits. It is both a place of belonging and a way of understanding.

[115] For more on indigenous knowledge systems (particularly within an environmental context) see the work of Kyle Powys Whyte, particularly his article "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Justice."

Warren's destruction of the swamp thus inflicts violence on multiple levels: it harms Oblivia, the land, and their nonhuman kin.

The violence of this act is heightened by the fact that the swamp, as I mention earlier, functioned as one of the few habitable places that remained on the planet. By "annihilating" the swamp, Warren renders its inhabitants—once more—into climate refugees, further sedimenting their status into the category of barren life. Moreover, the contradictory dynamics of development re-surface here, pointing to how Warren's growth as an individual contains a pernicious flipside: the destruction of aboriginal Country.

Yet how does Warren develop into an individual with a worldview so different from that of his kin? What causes him to change from a symbol of aboriginal hope to an enforcer of Australian/settler-colonial authority? Interestingly, Wright provides a micro-bildungsroman for Warren's character (inserted just before his character is introduced) to explain this transformation, one which tellingly stands in stark juxtaposition to Oblivia's atemporal tale of non-development. Their stories, however, are not meant to be read simply in contrast to one another. In fact, the narrator notes that "*their story* was unfolding dangerously through the complex design of children growing up in untidy times. Of times inscribed in the warped, dull state of a publicly determined fate. Or Law that stretched back to the beginning of time" (97, emphasis mine). By reframing these two experiences as a shared, singular story ("their story"), Wright reminds us, once more, of ways in which colonial development and peripheral mal-development are inextricably linked—his story is both the counterpoint and counterpart to Oblivia's.

Unlike Oblivia, whose youth is marked by the fact that she is unwanted by both the Australian state and her own community, Warren's youth is characterized by a sense of glowing adoration and constant attention. The narrator observes that "his elders had come

by earlier as they did regularly, to check on Warren, the boy who brought only joy, and who was commonly called, the gift from God. He lit up their hearts. Even though he was half-caste. They said he was an incarnate miracle" (88). And as the narrative continues, he is described by his elders—in excessively extravagant terms—as a "finely built boy who shone like the rising sun, and was already as fearless as their greatest ancestral spirits, [and] would one day become the best man that ever breathed air on this planet" (83). Warren's (obviously gendered) relationship with his community, such descriptions make clear, borders on the messianic.

But it is not just an atmosphere of adoration that distinguishes Warren's story from Oblivia's: the education that he receives also stands in stark contrast to her own. While Oblivia rejects Bella Donna's imposition of a Western curriculum, and receives no offers to learn traditional ecological knowledge from her community,[116] Warren receives a combination of both:

> The education Warren received at his Aboriginal Government's authorized school was a mixed marriage of traditional and scientific knowledge. In a curriculum that the elders had personally composed with all of the reverence to their traditional law, they watched over his education like hawks … teaching the young to survive in tough new environments. *We are swapping Band-Aid education for brand-new education, sealing the cracks—all the holes in the broken-down fences of Australian education policy for Indigenous peoples.* … Warren had been taught, from the day he entered his people's Aboriginal Government School of Brolga Nation as their *sweetest boy* of six years of age, that he would fulfill a vision primed for their own survival, that above all else, he would connect Brolga values with the future of the world. … This was how Warren Finch had been able to live on his traditional land as a practicing pupil of his Country. The official words about this education were described as being: *culturally holistic in all its philosophical, political and*

[116] I define this term below, but for further a sustained exploration of this topic, see: *Do Glaciers Listen?: Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* by Julie Cruikshank.

> *environmentally sustainable economic approaches for a school's curriculum which honored traditional law and the art of sustainability for culture and land.* (93-94)[117]

On the one hand (or, perhaps, on the surface), this educational program appears exceptionally progressive and even potentially decolonial in its valuation of traditional ecological knowledge—a contested term that, generally, signifies the knowledge and know-how accumulated by indigenous communities across generations, and renewed by each new generation, which guides human societies in their innumerable interactions with their surrounding environment (Wildcat). In placing indigenous knowledge alongside Western, "scientific" knowledge, the Brolga educational paradigm suggests the value of these often-marginalized knowledge structures and the ontologically distinct worldviews that undergird them. The ability to pass these knowledge systems on to Warren directly opposes previous educational protocols designed by the Australian state that had forced Aboriginal children into state-directed schooling (what is referred to here as "*Band-Aid education*") in order to disrupt Aboriginal sovereignty and assimilate indigenous populations into a white, settler culture. Instead, Warren's hybridized education ensures the continuation of a knowledge system that has been maintained across generations of kin. In short, it functions as an educational system attuned to the ways in which Aboriginal Australians find different means to cultivate spaces of autonomy—of a "sovereignty of the mind," to use Wright's words—while remaining open to relationships with outsiders and unexpected allies.

On the other hand, however, it is necessary to observe the ways in which the origins of this "experimental education" are grounded in dubious political origins (91). This is suggested through the narrator's observation that "the Brolga nation was chosen by an

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[117] Warren's bildungsroman is so over-stuffed with descriptions of his education that it steps into the realm of parody. This is made especially evident in the last line of the passage quoted above.

international fact-finding delegation to be their showpiece of what a future humane world was all about. A UN sign was erected at the entrance to the Brolga nation … This modern Brolga nation was just the kind of place that International Justice could promote to bring an end to the wars of homelessness across the world" (92). The narrator's account for the how Brolga nation was selected reveals that, even in this climate-changed world, political authority remains in the hands of the Western elite, thus undercutting any promise of radical Aboriginal sovereignty. Moreover, the language of this passage (they are a "showpiece" used to "promote" a humane future) satirically underscores why the Brolga nation is *valued*: they are meant to illustrate the promise of synthesizing indigenous alterity *into* a progressive, liberal (Western) ideology.[118] Wright further emphasizes—and ironizes—this point through the "official words" used by the Brolga nation to describe their educational approach—words that amount to nothing more than a mush of contradictory, jargon-laden eco-babel. Such observations correlate with Joseph Slaughter's examination of the "narratological alliance" between international human rights discourse and classical models of European education (which is formative of, and informed by, the bildungsroman genre). According to Slaughter, both "modern human rights and the Bildungsroman are reformist rather than revolutionary; [they contain] social preservationist impulses" (1410).[119] Keeping this shared

[118] Elizabeth Povinelli has written extensively on this topic throughout her career. In particular, see *The Cunning of Recognition*, which examines liberal multiculturalism from the perspective of Australian indigenous social life.

[119] Slaughter elaborates on this topic in his book, *Human Rights Inc.* He explains that "International human rights and the Bildungsroman are mutually enabling fictions: each projects an image of the human personality that ratifies the other's vision of the ideal relations between individual and society" (1407). According to Slaughter, this "human personality" (what he also terms the "universal human subject") is premised upon the European "bourgeois, white male citizen" (1407).

genealogy in mind helps us rationalize how and why Warren's education ultimately leads him away from the traditional knowledge systems of his own people.[120]

The narrator also notes that another impetus for this turn toward indigenous knowledge lies in the collapse of the world's climate systems. "Thank climate change," the narrator sardonically observes, "and even the wars such a catastrophe had created … that had cleaved the opportunity for this one nation of Indigenous people deemed worthy enough, to force Australia to sign a treaty" (91). While the Brolga nation enjoys the privilege granted by the Australian government, their attainment of a limited sovereignty betrays a sense of what indigenous scholars have theorized as a settler move to innocence. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang elaborate on this concept, explaining that "settler moves to innocence are those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all" (Tuck and Yang 6). Tuck and Yang's diagnosis of this hollow decolonial strategy highlights how, in the context of climate change, liberal and scientific discourse has embraced and swept up the insights of traditional ecological knowledge as a tool for combating environmental degradation. Understanding and implementing this knowledge without also advocating for land justice (that is, the restoration of indigenous lands to indigenous peoples), however, results in "decolonial" act that merely enacts a politics of information extraction. Moreover, their analysis of settler moves to innocence showcases how indigenous peoples—because they have successfully lived and thrived in particular ecosystems for thousands of years—are now being tasked with "fixing" the problems of

[120] For a sustained analysis of Sovereignty in Wright's work and political career, turn to Phillip Mead's essay, "Unresolved Sovereignty and the Anthropocene Novel: Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book*."

climate collapse by modelling more sustainable ways of living. For the sake of wealth and privilege, the Brolga nation, as Wright depicts, plays into and along with these moves to innocence, thus enabling the continued hegemony of a neo-imperial world-system.[121]

The details of Warren's educational history thus grant us insight into the kind of political leader and the kind of individual that he becomes—both of which dictate his treatment of Oblivia.[122] As the bildungsroman reveals, Warren's biculturalism "figures him as an assimilated other, [which] highlights the insidiousness of colonial power" (Putra 36).[123] This is perhaps most strongly displayed when Warren returns with Oblivia to the Australian capital, Canberra, for their wedding party. At this celebration, Oblivia is paraded around like an Aboriginal "doll" on display and carelessly introduced to Warren's political friends and supporters, all of whom "were rolling in money. *Most of which is the laundered profits of exploiting natural resources which has wound every cent of its way around the globe many times before it lands in this multicolored fashion parade* …" (201). Learning of the source of their wealth and political status—natural resources—once more calls to mind the white geologic optic that predominates Warren's worldview. Seeing the manifestation of this geo-logic in the setting of a soiree filled with Australia's wealthiest and most influential politicians, moreover,

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[121] Wright's text comments further on the Brolga nation's decision to go along with these empty, multicultural gestures: "But Brolga people had been opportunistic. They had made sure that they were in the right place at the right time. They blamed themselves and others like the swamp people for their troubles so that rich people would give them plenty of money. Luck was involved too with being anti-people, when they found themselves caught up in a mix of new thinking throughout the world" (91).

[122] My reference to "kind of individual," alludes to Sylvia Wynter's work in "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument." For Wynter, either one is "Human" and measured by a morphology that privileges an implicit whiteness, masculinity, cis-ness, hetero-ness, symmetry, and ability, or one is a biological organism without necessarily having recourse to the recognition humans share with each other.

[123] A truism of all postcolonial societies, says Bill Ashcroft, is that "imperial power circulates and produces rather than simply confines" (128).

resonates with Elizabeth Povinelli's conceptualization of geontopower in the context of late liberalism: "geontopower is not a power that is only now emerging to replace biopolitics—biopower (the governance through life and death) has long depended on a subtending geontopower (the difference between the lively and the inert)" (Povinelli, "Chapter 1").[124] According to Povinelli, geontopower can be understood as a mode of governance that has long subtended—and now enfolds—biopower; whereas biopower operates through the governance of life and the tactics of death, geontopower aggregates discourses, affects, and tactics that configure the relation between life (the Human, nonhuman animals—the biological) and nonlife (rocks, minerals, natural resources—the geological).[125] The operations of biopower, in other words, are contingent upon a certain (Western) understanding of what constitutes life. Warren's joy and comfort in this scene speaks to his whole-hearted embrace of this geontological perspective (the narrator notes that "Warren Finch was in his element"), reflecting the various ways in which the geologies of extraction have adapted to—and, in turn, influenced—the shifting shapes of Western imperialism (193).

Up to this point, I have tracked how Wright's novel utilizes the bildungsroman genre to explore two possible pathways for subject formation in the Anthropocene. Warren's narrative reveals how the teleology of Western development necessarily leads to the further amplification of climatological and ecological collapse; conversely Oblivia's stunted narrative

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[124] Kathryn Yusoff makes a parallel point when she observes that, "it is the very division between 'dead matter' and the privileged 'live subject' that constitutes the active politics of recognition in late liberalism. This axial division of materiality into passive and active forms, that might or might not become subjects (depending on their status on the color line), is the current bite of geopolitics" ("Chapter 4"). For both Povinelli and Yusoff a new language of the earth cannot be resolved in biopolitical modes (of inclusion) because of the hierarchical divisions that mark the biocentric subject.

[125] Povinelli provides a formula for visualizing the geontological: Life (Life{birth, growth, reproduction} v. Death) v. Nonlife

is utilized to portray the futurelessness of the developmental logics of global capitalism and neo-imperialism. And while this dystopian vision seems to echo that of *The Water Knife*, which concludes with a sense of doubt over whether (human) futurity might proceed without a reconciliation with some form of development, I'd like to conclude by exploring the ways in which Oblivia's unseasonable youth, which re-emerges in the final sections of the novel as its main narrative thread, provides an indigenous framework for reconsidering the dynamics of development. Closely attending to Wright's depiction of Oblivia's barren life, I suggest, allows us to glimpse modes of anti-colonial sociality that overflow the confines of geological perspectives that attempt structure and hierarchize non-Western worldviews.

On the surface, Oblivia's narrative depicts many of the difficulties and disenfranchisements that characterize barren life. As my analysis has discussed, Oblivia is ostracized by her community, who view her as permanently damaged and as an unwanted reminder of colonial violence; she is forced to reconceive of her ontological relation to the land in the wake of mega-drought; and she is dispossessed of her home, rights, and her kin after she is abducted by her would-be husband and oppressor, Warren Finch. Yet despite these characteristics, Wright's depiction of Oblivia retains a sense of animacy and agency. We see this first, for example, when the narrative describes Oblivia's experience of geological shock, in which she retreats to hide under the roots of an ancient tree. While a geontological perspective would view this act as indicative of her dehumanization (she is becoming inert, lifeless, and seemingly non-agential), Wright's description of this barren quality disrupts and upends such an interpretation. Instead, Wright's description suggests that Oblivia's identification with the drought-stricken landscape offers the possibility for

existence, endurance, and continuance *through*—rather than despite—her lithic enmeshment:[126]

> A little girl was lost. She had fallen into the deep underground bowel of a giant eucalyptus tree. … Locked in the world of sleep, only the little girl's fingers were constantly moving, in slow swirls like music. She was writing stanzas in ancient symbols … Whatever she was writing, dredged from the soup of primordial memory in these ancient lands, it was either the oldest language coming to birth again instinctively, or through some strange coincidence, the fingers of the unconscious child forming words that resembled the twittering of birdsong speaking about the daylight. … Her fingers traced the movements of the ghost language to write about the dead trees scattered through the swamp, where *dikili* ghost gums old as the hills once grew next to a deepwater lake fed by an old spring-spirit relative … (7-8)

Rather than turn away from geological discourse, Wright's depiction of Oblivia's human-lithic enmeshment intensifies this bond as a release from her bondage, an act that redefines both non-white subjectivity and "inert" materiality (Silva). As this passage indicates, Oblivia's barren condition enables her to tap into and conceptualize the deep temporality of the earth (the "primordial memory in these ancient lands"), and it establishes her place both in an ecological network and within an Aboriginal Dreamtime. Wright herself has suggested that the alternative ontology of the Dreamtime grants Aboriginal people a particular understanding of time on an ecological scale. In describing "indigenous memory," she writes that "men and women can name and tell the story of individual sites in their country, continuing a long tradition of watching over this country and maintaining the ecologically sustainable life" ("A Question of Fear" 135). The "ancient stories of the ancestral creation beings," she adds, are "mind maps that define the philosophical understanding of Aboriginal [L]aw, and which, taken together, embrace the entire continent" (135–136). Within this Dreamtime, Oblivia is able to reconnect with her ancestors, the ancient spirits that live in the

[126] This term is theorized and discussed by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, in his book *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*.

changing, desertified landscape.[127] Oblivia's inhuman rendering, this passage suggests, "can be claimed as a different kind of resource than in its propertied colonial form" (Yusoff, Chapter 4).

Oblivia's rearticulations of barren life (with its associations of stasis and inertness) are also depicted through her mode of communication. Most criticism of *The Swan Book* tends to interpret Oblivia's character as silent or voiceless, an interpretation that emphasizes the trauma of her violence and her positioning in the novel as a subaltern figure. Adeline Johns-Putra, for example, notes that "Oblivia's silence creates something of a vacuum for other voices to fill" (35). While there is value in recognizing how her silence reflects the enforced violence and erasure of many Aboriginal communities in Australia, it is also important to note that the novel does not necessarily depict Oblivia as voiceless. Rather, it would be more accurate to claim that her voice simply exceeds or confounds a human register. The narrator points to this by explaining that

> the girl would manage to make only certain sounds that did not even closely resemble vowels. … The only sounds she heard emanating from the girl's mouth were of such low frequency that the old woman strained to distinguish what usually fell within the range of bushland humming, such as leaves caught up in gusts of wind, or the rustling of the *wiyarr* spinifex grasses in the surrounding landscape as the wind flew over them, or sometimes the flattened whine of distant birdsong, or a raging bushfire crackling and hissing. (17-18)

As this passage suggests, Oblivia's voice strains the Western ear (that of Aunty Bella Donna) due to its affinity with the voices of the barren land that Oblivia has become enmeshed in. Her voice thus acts as a conduit for a landscape that has been degraded by extractive industries, weapons testing, pollution, and the extreme weather of anthropogenic climate

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[127] Aboriginal dreamtime is a complex philosophical subject. For information on this topic (as well as a history of anthropological response to it), see Patrick Wolfe's essay "On Being Woken Up: The Dreamtime in Anthropology and in Australian Settler Culture."

change. And while nonhuman subjects are not always the focus of the novel, Wright's inclusion of them here suggests that nonhuman agents have just as much to say as the human subject. From this perspective, Oblivia's multivoice powerfully resists the autonomous and individualized subjectification of the Australian settler state, embracing instead a more horizontal epistemology, one based on interdependence and mutuality.[128]

It is in the novel's closing moments, though, that Oblivia most evocatively transforms the properties of a barren life. By the novel's end, Oblivia has escaped from Warren (who is assassinated), has fled Canberra where she was confined in a towering apartment building, and travels back to the swamp, which has now been fully desertified as a consequence of the region's unnatural drought. In this speculative, disorienting, and fugue-like scene, Oblivia's identity fully collapses into that of the drought-stricken landscape, and her anchoring in a specific time becomes unmoored. The narrator explains: "She was not surprised when the drought echoed her words in the North country's open space. It was a close relative who had always lived in the same house. They echoed eachother: *Listen, Hard Up! No-hearted cruel thing! Lucky for me with no words left to come into my mouth that I got back*" (298). And as the passage continues, Oblivia is placed in relation to other ancient desert spirits that emanate from the North Country and the cosmological figure of the Rainbow Serpent.

The disorienting language of this passage—which confuses distinctions between speaker and listener, human and landscape, and subject and object—formally mirrors the increasing abstraction of Oblivia's own human subjectivity. This scene can thus be read as a

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[128] Moreover, as Linda Daley observes, "The narrative's points of view are constantly shifting: from human to tree (79); to the junk of the rotting hulks (11); to the snake (183); to bird (15, 18, and 71), as well as shifts in the order of reality (dreamt, imagined, and reported). These different points of view dissolve the distinction between a human subject of perception and a world of non-human objects. They dissolve an external reality to show that each of these viewpoints has its own individuated reality" (308).

moment that signals Oblivia's return to the ecological network indexed by Aboriginal Dreamtime, which Wright explains allows "men and women to tell the story of individual sites in their country, continuing a long tradition of watching over this country and maintaining ecologically sustainable life" ("A Question of Fear" 135). Oblivia's positioning in this closing scene thus counters the way that the desert, as Elizabeth Povinelli explains, has often been framed as a site that restabilizes the distinction between Life and Nonlife, "as a place that stands for all things perceived as denuded of life" (Chapter 1).[129] Rather, for Oblivia, the desert constitutes a site of agency and endurance, where active battles for sovereignty can be waged, and where imperial geological grammars may be overturned and provincialized. As Tiffany King suggests, "black fungibility can also operate as a site of deferral or escape from the current entrapments of the human" (1024). Ultimately, then, the novel subverts the generic expectations of the bildungsroman (which would see Oblivia crystallize into an individual) and it supersedes the trope of arrested development (which would see Oblivia trapped in a state of suspension and, ultimately, death). Rather, Wright re-works the genre to illustrate that Oblivia's subjectivity comes through her dissolution into the multiple and the collective—into the actually living geology that previously had been used confine her.

It's important to acknowledge, however, that *The Swan Book* isn't meant to function as a ready-made blueprint for alternative modes of development, nor does it outline an escape plan from the ruinous tracks of Western progress. The indeterminate and opaque nature of the novel's conclusion challenges the unlikely effectiveness of these potentially appropriative maneuvers. Rather, I want to suggest that Oblivia's narrative reflects the need

[129] Povinelli notes that "The Desert is the space where life was, is not now, but could be if knowledges, techniques, and resources were properly managed" (Chapter 1).

for telling stories that cultivate an orientation toward radical hope—Jonathan Lear's phrase for a hope that persists by forbearing to imagine the conditions, or even the subjects, of survival across a coming discontinuity. This is a mode of engaging with the future—and its possible pathways—that is only in part determined by the past and by the present moment. From this perspective, *The Swan Book* can be read as a positive narrative gesture that taps into hope's capacity for suggesting that not all is already given or determined and that struggles for life should not be overlooked. Oblivia's return her home, and her final, ambiguous transformation, acts as a testament to the powerful potential inherent to this work.

Conclusion: Drought, Development, and the Promise of Scalability

This chapter began with my account of an interview with Claire Vaye Watkins, in which she expresses doubt over the novel's ability to both portray the immensity of anthropogenic climate change and, in turn, incite any significant political change or affective action. This perspective, as I mention earlier, resonates with Amitav Ghosh claims in *The Great Derangement*, pertaining to the modern novel's representative capacities and limitations for mapping climatic shift. I'd like to conclude this chapter by returning to Ghosh's argument in *The Great Derangement*, specifically as it unfolds in the final section of his book, which links large-scale political and social issues with the problematics of individualism.

In the third and final part of his book, Ghosh turns his attention to the sphere of politics, diagnosing a widespread "vision of politics as a moral journey" as an important reason for the "ever-growing divergence between a public sphere of political performance and the realm of actual governance" (129). In the "post-political spaces" that the nation states of the West have by and large become (132), he writes, the levers of power are held by "largely invisible establishments … guided by imperatives of their own" (129), whereas "the public sphere, where politics is performed, has been largely emptied of content in terms of

the exercise of power: as with fiction, it has become a forum for secular testimony, a baring-of-the-soul in the world-as-church" (131).

For Ghosh, then, politics in the Anthropocene suffers from the same deficiency as serious modern fiction: an over-investment in the dynamics of individual morality (see reference to Updike's description of the novel as "individual moral adventure," [quoted in Ghosh, 77]). Both of these share a genealogy in the larger cultural substructure of the "everyday political philosophy of the nineteenth century": the basic Enlightenment tenet, following Keynes, that "individuals pursuing their own interests with enlightenment, in condition of freedom, always tend to promote the general interest at the same time" (quoted in Ghosh, 134). In manifesting primarily as a question of moral being—in espousing a politics of the morality of the individual subject—the modern novel precludes itself from conversing with the seemingly unassailable matrixes of power that currently hold sway over society, or the so-called "deep state" (131). That is to say, the mainstream literary establishment's participation in the "spectacle" of the moral journey, or the anxiety of the avant-garde, throughout the modern era, to signal their affiliation with perceived progressive trends emanating from the centers of modernity, has ironically betrayed the very spirit of engagement that motivated it.

Ghosh eventually proposes, through a reading of the pope's Encyclical from 2015, *Laudato Si'*, a literary approach that registers the complexity of the links between global inequality and ecological distress as a remedy to the modern novel's political inefficacy. The call, then, is for a literature that espouses the need for structural, rather than individual moral redress, founded broadly along the lines of injustice marked by the long history of imperial conquest and colonial oppression.

While I agree with Ghosh's demand for literature and literary approaches that speak to and evoke the need for systemic, large-scaled change (and which thus resist narratives of the individual and their responsibility/potential heroism), my reading complicates—or provides a strategy for navigating—this opposition: my reading models how the narrative genre of the bildungsroman assists us in thinking across the scales of the individual and the nation in the everyday Anthropocene. As a form that works across two seemingly disparate scales, the bildungsroman excels in capturing the quotidian aspects of life in drought alongside the systemic structures that animate climatological breakdown. And in Bacigcalupi's and Wright's hands, it effectively complicates or subverts nationalist questions of development and political progress.

My intention therefore is not to invalidate Ghosh's assessment, but to invite us to examine the ways in which the critical energies of much postcolonial and decolonial scholarship and aesthetic production powerfully disrupt established narrative conventions and the histories they presume. For the two authors examined in this chapter, as my analysis has shown, it is precisely the narrative of the individual that functions as useful conduit for grappling with both the intimate and outsized dimensions of our climate crisis.

Chapter Three

Feline Extinction and Emplotting the Trophic Cascade in Linda Hogan's *Power* and Henrietta Rose-Innes's *Green Lion*

> I have lived to see state after state extirpate its wolves. I have watched the face of many a new wolfless mountain, and seen the south-facing slopes wrinkle with a maze of new deer trails. I have seen every edible bush and seedling browsed, first to anemic desuetude, and then to death. I have seen every edible tree defoliated to the height of a saddle horn. … Hence we have dustbowls, and rivers washing the future into the sea.
>
> ~ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

Introduction: Trophic Cascades and the Sixth Extinction

As numerous scholars across disciplines have commented, we are in the midst of a global mass extinction event—otherwise referred to as the Holocene extinction. Previously, our earth has experienced five mass extinction events, dating as far back as four-hundred forty million years ago (this is referred to as the Ordovician-Silurian extinction event). Each of these events wiped out, according to scientific analysis, more than sixty percent of life on the planet. In defining mass extinction events, scientists and scholars have suggested that they each share three common characteristics. Firstly, mass extinction events are necessarily global in scope, and thus not determined or constrained by regional parameters or borders. Secondly, they occur when extinction rates rise significantly above background levels of extinction; or, in other words, they occur when the loss of species rapidly outpaces the rate of speciation. And finally, within a geological temporal framework, they occur across a geologically "short" period of time (the "event" might last for thousands of years, appearing to be quite slow from a human perspective).[130] Unlike the past five extinction events, which

[130] Anthony Hallam and Paul Wignall, British paleontologists who have written extensively on the subject, explain that "Mass extinctions are different. Instead of a background hum there's a crash, and disappearance rates spike" (72). They define mass extinctions as events

are believed to have been caused by asteroid strikes, volcanic eruptions, and natural climate shifts, our present crisis is the first to have a human origin point. "Right now," Elizabeth Kolbert writes in her study on the topic, "we are deciding, without quite meaning to, which evolutionary pathways will remain open and which will forever be closed. No other creature has ever managed this, and it will, unfortunately, be our most enduring legacy" (88).

At the same time that humanity must reckon with its role in our present biodiversity crisis, we must contend with the fact that species extinction has occurred at a faster rate and larger frequency in the global South—a reality amplified by the global South's disproportionate exposure to environmental and climatic violence.[131] Extinction, with this understanding in mind, is not simply an issue caused by an undifferentiated humanity, but it is a consequence of

> The expansion of capitalist social relations through European colonialism and imperialism, [which] pushed what had previously been regional environmental catastrophes to a planetary scale. In addition, by transforming nature into a commodity that could be bought and sold, capitalist society shifted humanity's relations with nature into a mode of intense ecological exploitation unimaginable in previous epochs. [132] (Dawson 33)

The sixth extinction, in other words, cannot be understood in isolation from a critique of capitalism and imperialism. Understanding this perspective allows us to account for the structural forces that generate exploitation and ecocide, it allows us to generate a profound sense of how such forces may push the vulnerable to behave in ways that are antithetical to

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that eliminate a "significant proportion of the world's biota in a geologically insignificant amount of time" (70).

[131] The disproportionate extinction impact on the global South is also due to the fact that the tropics are disproportionately in the global south.

[132] Dawson also explains that this is a direct result of capitalism's logic: "1) capitalism tends to degrade the conditions of its own production; 2) it must expand ceaselessly in order to survive; 3) it generates a chaotic world system, which in turn intensifies the extinction crisis" (36). As such, extinction is both a material reality and a cultural discourse that shapes popular perceptions of the world, one that often legitimates an inegalitarian social order.

their long-term interest, and it helps us develop a conception of how people in the relatively affluent global North might act in solidarity with those whom Frantz Fanon called "the wretched of the earth." This is a vital insight to keep in mind, not only because it complicates and nuances dominant conceptions of the sixth extinction, but because it allows for the possibility of political intervention. In other words, if we understand the sixth extinction as a product of capitalism and imperialism—rather than as a tendency of humanism, broadly construed—then it also becomes an issue that we can responsibly address, intervene in, and potentially even mitigate. In the face of such an irredeemably rapacious and ultimately impoverishing system, it becomes more imperative than ever to insist on the human capacity to imagine and to build a more just, more biologically diverse world—a challenge that, as I will demonstrate throughout this chapter, narrative structure (i.e. plot) has responded to in compelling and thought-provoking ways.

Recently, we have witnessed a flourishing of cultural production—including film, documentary, photography, fiction, visual art, and theatre—that sets out to tackle the problem of species extinction. In her culturally inflected approach to extinction studies, *Imagining Extinction,* Ursula Heise examines a range of such cultural objects and trends, tracing how they help us grapple with the scale and complexity of the sixth extinction crisis. As a cultural and literary scholar, Heise is interested in mapping out the imaginative elements that repeat themselves across many stories and the means these elements use to convince readers with quite different experiences to share the environmentalist concerns expressed in them. Throughout this text, Heise discovers that questions about endangered species and mass extinction (and about how they come to form part of our cultural life) are also questions that environmentalism, more broadly understood, is currently grappling and struggling with.

Rather than focus on the "uniquely personal content" of various extinction projects, however, her approach strives to foreground issues of emotional, cultural, economic investment—issues that constitute the broader structures of imagination. With this goal in mind, she explores the following questions: What do the images that we use to represent endangered species reveal, and what do they hide? What kind of awareness, emotion, and action are such stories and images meant to generate? And what broader cultural values and social conflicts are they associated with? Through her engagement with such questions, Heise ultimately argues that:

> however much individual environmentalists may be motivated by a selfless devotion to the well-being of nonhuman species, however much individual conservation scientists may be driven by an eagerness to expand our knowledge and understanding of the species with whom we co-inhabit the planet, their engagements with these species gain sociocultural traction to the extent that they become part of the stories that human communities tell about themselves: stories about their origins, their development, their identity, and their future horizons. (5)

Heise unpacks this provocative claim through her critical engagements with a range of contemporary fiction and literary texts, offering readings on novels like Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*, and Mayra Montero's *In the Palm of Darkness*—novels, she suggests, that illustrate how biodiversity, endangered species, and extinction are primarily cultural issues, questions of what we value and what stories we tell, and only secondarily issues of science.

Through these readings, Heise expounds upon the usage and value of various literary forms, plots, and genres, each employed by writers to communicate a particular concern for the environment or for an environmentalist agenda. One commonly deployed genre, for example, is the template of the elegy, which has been used to portray well-adapted animal species at risk or those that have already vanished through no fault of their own. According to Heise, many of the species that are singled out for attention function as symbolic

shorthands for more encompassing stories about a particular nation's history of modernization and its changing relationship to the natural world, or about broader misgivings regarding the planetary consequences of modernization. In another chapter, Heise examines how artists utilize the affordances of the epic to convey a more panoramic view of mass extinction, one that might capture the magnitude of a crisis that affects thousands of species and the entire globe.

Following Heise's lead, this chapter theorizes and identifies a commonly crafted (though undiscussed) narrative template that is presently being used to chronicle biodiversity loss: trophic cascade emplottment. Before defining this term, however, I'd like briefly to unpack the idea of the trophic cascade. In 1949, the well-known writer, ecologist, and forester, Aldo Leopold, composed *A Sand County Almanac*. This hugely influential book consists of numerous essays that explore questions of conservation, environmental politics, modernization, and eco-philosophy. Of the various essays published in *A Sand County Almanac*, the seminal essay "Thinking Like a Mountain" is perhaps the most widely known. In this essay, Leopold recounts going on a hunting trip to Idaho with a group of his close friends. Their aim in this hunt, Leopold explains, was to exterminate a local wolf population so that the deer population could, in turn, multiply: "fewer wolves meant more deer, and no wolves would mean hunters' paradise" (136).

As Leopold and his hunting partner confront and kill a mother wolf, however, he experiences a revelation: "just as a deer herd lives in mortal fear of its wolves, so does a mountain live in mortal fear of its deer" (138). In this moment, Leopold begins to tease out the ripple-effects of what, through his work, would come to be known as the trophic cascade, "an ecological phenomenon triggered by the addition or removal of top predators and involving reciprocal changes in the relative populations of predator and prey through a

food chain, which often results in dramatic changes in ecosystem structure and nutrient cycling" (Carpenter).[133] In other words, the trophic cascade describes the knock off effects of removing top predators, like wolves, from food webs. Leopold later goes on to more fully unpack this understanding through his description (cited in this chapter's epigraph) of how the wolf's extermination leads to unexpected and dire consequences for the mountain's larger ecology: the elimination of a wolf leads to the increase of deer, which leads to the decimation of plant life, which affects tree growth, which leads to barren landscapes, and eventually reaches the sea.[134]

Since the time of Leopold's writing, the concept has only become more popular, utilized for conceptualizing runaway ecological damage, or for addressing ecological violence across spatial and temporal scales in the Anthropocene. In *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet,* for example, ecologist Ingrid Parker reminds us of how the commercial hunting of sea otters off Pacific North America changed kelp forests to sea urchin barrens; without the otters, urchins took over. Because they were connected by common soil ecologies, whole suites of perennial grasses and wildflowers disappeared in California with the invasion of European annual grasses.[135] "Entanglement with others makes life possible," the editors write, "but when one relationship goes awry, the repercussions ripple" (M5). An article in the online journal *Unearthed* adds to these conversations by addressing the ripple effects of various

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[133] "Trophic cascade" is often anachronistically and incorrectly attributed to Aldo Leopold. While his work describes the downstream effects of species loss, the concept originated with the ecologist Robert T. Paine. His article, "Food Web Complexity and Species Diversity," describes the rise and fall of connected species throughout the food web.

[134] His repetition of the phrase "I have seen" helps knit these effects together.

[135] Sea otters are a keystone species which means that they can exert top-down pressure via predation on sea urchins, which are grazers upon kelp. As urchin density decreases from sea otter predation, so does the grazing pressure on kelp and as a result kelp forests flourish in the presence of sea otters.

"bottom-up" trophic cascades, which occur when increases or decreases in the abundance of small plants and animals disrupt the entire food web, ultimately impacting the top of the food chain. This phenomenon can be observed through the disappearance of amphibians and salamanders: "Amphibians are integral to their ecosystems. They are herbivores and carnivores, predator and prey. They link habitats on land with those in water. They provide food for birds, animals and snakes. They eat flies and mosquitoes that spread human diseases, from dengue fever to malaria" (2019).[136] As such examples illustrate, the trophic cascade has become a useful and adaptable ecological model, helpful in exploring the entanglement and scalar multiplicity of ecological loss in the Anthropocene.

Considering such insights and ecological trends, this chapter examines how novelists have taken up and adapted the ecological model of the trophic cascade to dramatize the ecological repercussions faced by particular communities. Though it's possible to track this narrative technique across numerous texts, I will focus on two novels that depict the cascades caused by extinction in complementary ways: Linda Hogan's *Power* (set in the Florida everglades) and Henrietta Rose-Innes's *Green Lion* (set in Cape Town). Both novels begin with, and thus foreground, the slaughter of an endangered feline, triggering an avalanche of ecological, cultural, and affective consequences, many of which are unforeseen by the novel's protagonists. This narrative technique—which I identify as a trophic cascade emplottment—thus orients readers to the vast webs of life that are impacted by the loss of a keystone species.[137]

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[136] The notion of "keystone species" was introduced in 1966 by the biologist Robert Paine, who researched the impact of starfish on sea urchins, mussels, and crabs. For a detailed discussion of the varied criteria that go into species conservation decisions, see Perlman and Adelson (1997, especially chaps. 2–4), and the essays collected in Kareiva and Levin (2003).
[137] The IUCN research analyzed data on 27,500 species of land vertebrates and found the ranges of a third of them have shrunk in recent decades. The researchers point to the

In my analysis, *Power* depicts the execution of a Florida panther (a sacred animal, or "earth-being,") to jumpstart reflections on whether extinction signifies the end of a life form or the end of a form of living, particularly in the context of ongoing settler-colonial violence. This section of the chapter examines how Hogan amplifies and extends the ecological model of the trophic cascade to more fully explore the depth, unexpected layers, and significance of keystone species removal. In particular, this reading attends to the novel's emphasis on indigenous epistemologies, which complicate Western ecological discourse and emphasize the importance of creating dialogue between differing (and at times conflicting) modes of environmental stewardship. The reading concludes with an examination of how Indigenous worldviews can help us theorize the possibility that extinction might also create an opportunity for the formation of new subjectivities.

Section II of this chapter picks up on the question of new life against the backdrop of extinction. My reading suggests that *Green Lion* portrays the death of another feline (the Cape lion) to imagine how the radial repercussions of loss can encourage us to imagine new, unexpected modes of ecological conservation. Rather than complicate and dwell on the consequences and scale of the trophic cascade (this is the important work that Hogan's text performs), Rose-Innes's novel critically engages with various popular conservationist movements, such as "de-extinction" and "rewilding," before ultimately arguing for an ecologically just and anti-colonial approach to conservation—what we might call the work of environmental "inheritance." Ultimately, then, I argue that these novels alter the structure of the trophic cascade by adding humankind, culture, and even climate to the affected

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"emblematic" case of the lion to emphasize this point: "The lion was historically distributed over most of Africa, southern Europe, and the Middle East, all the way to northwestern India. [Now] the vast majority of lion populations are gone" (Carrington).

ecosystem. From this perspective, species extinction not only stems from climate change, but ultimately loops back into its destructive pattern. I suggest that acknowledging this pattern, however, also enables us to potentially mitigate it.

—Part I—

Linda Hogan's Environmental Imagination

Linda Hogan (Chickasaw nation) was born in 1947 in Denver, Colorado. An ecofeminist poet, novelist, and memoirist, Hogan is often identified as one of the most prominent voices in contemporary Native American literature. She has received numerous awards throughout her prolific career, including the Woodcraft Circle Writer of the Year award (2002), a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas (1998), and Lannam Award for outstanding achievement in poetry (1994). Additionally, she was named a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in 1990 and has been a recipient of grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation.

Hogan began writing in the 1970s, establishing herself as a keen chronicler of Indigenous traditions, native responses to settler-violence, and, perhaps most importantly, Indigenous relations to land. Though Hogan herself if Chickasaw, she has written novels on behalf of various Indigenous communities, aligning native identity—regardless of tribal affiliation—with a respect for and stewardship of the earth.[138] Claims of sovereignty, therefore, are less the function of tribally specific nationalism and more closely tied to the recognition that the landscape itself enjoys a status superior to the more recent political claims of humans. Hogan's work argues that a belief in the human and nonhuman, as equivalently animate, constitutes the cornerstone of an indigenous identity. And many of her

[138] Several Indigenous scholars have taken issue with this gesture, which they understand to be appropriative.

novels question how this understanding could generate action that would disrupt the cultural dispossession and the violation of the land faced by native communities. Drawing on Audre Lorde's statement that "the Master's tools will not dismantle his house," she has said that her "own efforts have gone into new tools, the dismantling, the rebuilding. Writing is my primary crowbar, saw, and hammer" ("Two Lives" 244).

Several of Hogan's novels demonstrate her interest in examining how narrative might oppose and/or identify colonial violence, particularly when it leads to environmental destruction. One of her earliest novels, *Mean Spirit* (1990), is set in Oklahoma during the 1920s. The novel's plot takes its inspiration from the historical discovery, by Anglo-Americans, of the vast oil reserves that flowed underneath land owned and dwelled on by the Osage nation. The novel begins with the murder of Grace Blanket, an Indigenous woman who acquired vast wealth through mineral leases for her land. The narrative follows the story of the detective who is sent from Washington DC to investigate her murder, and his relationship her daughter and heir, Nola, who stands to inherit her mother's oil-rich land yet faces tremendous risk in doing so. Through Nola's narrative, the novel explores the schemes enacted by petroleum corporations, which killed and dispossessed Indigenous communities in the pursuit of petroleum—an incident historically known as the Osage land grab murders. Through these events, Hogan maps out the numerous ways in which federal Indian law and, indeed, any institutionalized system of law is unlikely to prove sufficient to preserve the earth or Native communities. By the novel's end, detective Red Hawk, who initially believes in the protective capacities of federal law enforcement for resolving the injustices faced by the Osage, resigns from his position, realizing that the law will neither offer him the truth nor provide adequate protection for the Osage or their land. Like so

many other characters in the book, he returns to the Hill People and resumes practices that he associates with his own tribal upbringing.

A second novel, *Solar Storms* (1995), is based on the James Bay Hydroelectric Project and Indigenous resistance to its construction during the 1970s. Hogan tells the story of 17-year-old Angel Iron's coming-of-age in the midst of this environmental crisis. The novel follows Angel as she relocates to an island town that lies at the border of Canada and Minnesota, where she finds that an eager developer is planning a hydroelectric dam that will leave sacred land flooded and abandoned. Joining up with three other women in her family (a friend, her great-grandmother, and her great-great-grandmother), Angela fights the reservoir project, reconnecting with her ancestral roots as she does so. Near the conclusion of *Solar Storms*, one of the tribal elders who has spearheaded the resistance testifies in an urban courtroom, presumably the Quebec court that had original jurisdiction over the tribes' lawsuit. While Angel realizes that the testimony is only partially effective—for the white listeners still regard Indians as "only a remnant of the past" (343) and are reluctant to accept Indigenous perceptions of the truth—the legal action does finally lead to the cessation of construction on the dams, just as it did in Canadian history. Akin to *Mean Spirit*, *Solar Storms* is careful to note that legal institutions are not prepared to accept the stories of an indigenous consciousness as valid in their own terms—something painfully clear to anyone familiar with the history of Native litigation in either Canadian or U.S. courts. However, unlike *Mean Spirit*, it also suggests that Indigenous movements can force the law—again, with much struggle—to acknowledge the legitimacy of resistance to the continued colonization of the earth, even if only in small ways.

Power, the focus of this chapter, resembles *Solar Storms* insofar as it links a coming-of-age story to questions of Indigenous resistance to violence against the earth. The novel

follows the experiences of Omishto, a sixteen-year-old Taiga Indian, whose name means "the One Who Watches" (4). In the aftermath of an abnaturally destructive hurricane, Omishto accompanies her aunt Ama, who has set out to track and exterminate a sickly and aging panther.[139] The latter half of the novel (which has received the most critical attention) details the two trials that Ama is subjected to: the first takes places in a U.S. federal court, and is dictated by what Omishto terms "American law"; the second trial is orchestrated by council of Taiga elders who live deep in the Everglades (the place of "old law"), far from Western development. In both cases, Omishto is enjoined to speak about Ama's actions, and much of the novel contends with Omishto's difficulties in comprehending the motivations behind her aunt's actions. In the first case, the killing seems to violate federal law because the panther is a protected species; in the second, Ama appears to have ignored the tribal traditions that regard the panther as sacred and prohibit its slaughter, except in a ritually prescribed manner. By the novel's end, Ama is banished from the tribe, leaving Omishto to take her place in the Taiga community.

While it is undoubtedly useful to examine the novel's depiction of the various legal systems that judge and assess Ama's actions, this chapter instead considers why Ama kills the panther in the first place. What, in other words, is her motive? And what does she hope the panther's death will achieve? Arnold Krupat and Michael A. Elliott have pursued similar questions in their review of the novel, noting that by making Omishto the narrator of the novel and placing her consciousness at its center, "Hogan focuses on a protracted struggle to

[139] The description of the storm emphasizes the strangeness and power of the hurricane: "I scream and I see that the sky is bruised and unnatural, and the wind is so strong the deer are flying, looks of terror on their faces" (36); "Most days the clouds disappear in the morning. They go back to the gulf or they wander in toward land, but today they keep arriving with restless weight..." (2).

understand the extraordinary actions that might be necessary to 'restore this world to balance.' Omishto comes to realize that Ama understood herself as a participant in an 'old story that we must have followed,' a story that necessitated the killing of the panther and perhaps even Ama's subsequent banishment from the tribe. (152). Her understanding thus includes the recognition that such sacrifices can become catalysts for the restoration of the world. Building on this work, my analysis examines how, exactly, Ama's killing of the panther triggers a larger ecological restoration. And, moreover, it traces how the ecological model of the trophic cascade proves vital to this aim.

The Florida Panther, the Everglades, and the Trophic Cascade in Hogan's *Power*

To answer such questions, it is vital to delve more deeply into *Power's* depiction of the Florida panther and its role in and relationship to the ecosystem of the Florida Everglades. The Florida panther (felis concolor coryi) is a unique cougar subspecies of medium size that lives in pinelands, tropical hardwood hammocks, and mixed freshwater swamp forests. A carnivore, often living in solitude, the panther's diet consists both of small animals, such as hares, mice, and waterfowl, and larger prey such as storks, white-tailed deer, feral pigs, and American alligators. In 1973, the Florida panther was added to the IUCN endangered species list, a result of southern Florida's large-scale development and modernization, which adversely affected the panther's behaviour and the population's ability to reproduce.[140] At the time, it was estimated that about twenty panthers remained in the

[140] In a study on Florida panther conservation, biologist David Maehr notes that "as recently as a hundred years ago, panthers could be found throughout the areas now bisected by … interstate highways" (25). With the development of sprawling interstates and vast agricultural industries, the panther's habitat and hunting range has been reduced to a fraction of its prior size. The remaining fragmented forestlands, he further observes, "are not enough to sustain the Florida panther in its historical range. The occupied range in south Florida today accounts for only 5 percent of the area once inhabited by the panther" (25).

wild; since then, conservationists estimate that their numbers have risen to approximately two-hundred and thirty.

Efforts to protect and revive the Florida panther population have received so much attention, in part, because of the panther's ecological significance: it acts as a flagship and keystone species. As a keystone species, the Florida panther "protects many other plants and animals that live there. [Situated] at the top of the food chain, these cats help keep feral hog numbers in check and deer, raccoon and other prey populations balanced and healthy" (Maehr 52). In part, this is because "panthers help to reduce the number of sick or weak animals, which in turn keeps the prey populations healthy." However, because they inhabit such a key ecological position, their diminishment has also given rise to an extended network of loss—as is indexed by the trophic cascade.

At first glance, the dissolution of these intricate lifeways is persuasively replicated by Hogan's novel. On the level of plot, the novel reproduces these ripple effects of the trophic cascade by beginning its narrative with the death of the panther, which takes place in the first third of the novel. Because of this structure, all subsequent events in the novel are read in light of this triggering moment. After the panther's death, for example, Hogan mentions how panther elimination has contributed to escalation of deer populations in the Everglades (95). The increase in the deer's population, in turn, results in the denudation of the region's flora, which comes about as a result of deer consuming local plants. Without sufficient plant life, the region where the novel takes place experiences severe flooding. This, too, is chronicled in the book: after the hurricane, Omishto notes that "the strong winds had blown water all across the land. There are no edges, no borders between elements because everything is water, silver and glassy" (46). As this sequence of events depicts, the novel's plot sequence, at least initially, replicates the hierarchical structure of the trophic cascade.

My interest, however, pertains more so to the ways that the novel borrows and then amplifies or reconfigures the logic of the trophic cascade in order to communicate the unexpected repercussions of species extinction in the Anthropocene—leading to what I have termed the novel's trophic cascade emplottment. One of the central ways that Hogan's novel disrupts the typical structure of the trophic cascade is through its radical extension of the panther's death—the "moment" that typically triggers an ecological breakdown. In *Power*, the death of the Florida panther stretches on for nearly ten pages: the scene begins with an extended description of Ama tracking the panther for miles, through thick foliage and trees with moss hanging down from their branches; when Ama finally encounters and shoots the panther, the narrative further slows to describe the corpse of the panther (72), Ama's response (77), and Omishto's reaction to the events (79). The extended scene ultimately concludes with an account of Ama skinning the cat, enacting a Taiga ceremony in thanks for its death, and carrying it back to her home miles away.

By slowing this moment down, Hogan creates space for critically reflecting on the panther's death, allowing us to see that the panther was dying long before its encounter with Ama. As the witness to this event, Omishto acts as our guide into this provocations: while reflecting on the panther's death, for instance, Omishto comments that "sugarcane and cattle and white houses with red roofs had killed the land and the panther people even before the storm, they are the true violators" (114). Her reference thus draws attention to the larger issues of development that have disrupted the lifeways of the Florida panther, inserting these concerns into the ecological model of the trophic cascade.

Moreover, Omishto also comments on the panther's ill health: **"**[the panther] has broken teeth, and fleas and ticks are still escaping the lifeless body. I can see its ribs … around the neck, the fur is all flattened, and it looks nearly gone, warn away. … Its long cat

face is scarred. … It is a large cat, but thin. Very thin. … You have to look up close to see that it is a real pitiful thing" (69). Such a description points to the various health issues that plague the remaining Florida panther community (caused by pollution and in-breeding) and raises questions as to whether a sickened, diminished population can actually reproduce in order to escape its critically endangered status. Both these insights destabilize our initial understanding of Ama as the panther's killer, suggesting that the actual culprit is the slow violence of Florida's urban development. The novel's collision with the ecological model of the trophic cascade thus forces readers to reflect on what, why, and how an apex predator is removed from a trophic system.

Earth Beings on the Edge of Extinction

Perhaps the most radical alteration to the trophic cascade, however, comes through the novel's explanation that the panther, according to Taiga worldview, is not just an endangered species—a classification that adheres to Western, scientific standards and practices—but a sacred, cosmological being.[141] With this difference in mind, it becomes clear that *Power* also urges its reader to consider the following implied questions: What does it mean when a cosmological figure is pushed to the edge of extinction? And, moreover, what aesthetic arrangements and configurations are most adept at addressing this possibility?

To attend to these questions, it might be useful to map out the significance—and the specifics—of the panther as a sacred being for the Taiga people. We first learn of the panther's status when Omishto reviews the Taiga clan's story of the Panther Woman; she explains:

[141] Species have been classified in terms of Linnaean taxonomy since the eighteenth century.

> There is a Taiga story about Panther Woman. And I think Ama got lost in this story… It's an old story about a panther and a woman, told to me by Ama, told to Ama by Janie Soto who is the oldest member of our tribe.
>
> This is how I heard it. Years ago, Panther walked on two feet. A woman lived in the dark swamp of the early world in those days. … It was given this woman to keep the world in balance. … She was there to refresh our thoughts and renew our acts. … One day a storm blew with so much strength that it left an opening between the worlds. Panther Woman saw that opening, followed the panther into that other world. … The unfortunate thing was that the door blew closed behind her and she had to find a way to open it again.
>
> 'You have to kill one of us,' the panther, who was dying, told her. 'It should be me. I'm not the oldest or the weakest, but I'm the one you know best.'
>
> A sacrifice was called for and if it was done well, all the animals would and the panther would come back again and they'd be whole. The people in those days believed that the hunted, if hunted correctly, would return again. In Taiga, the word for sacrifice means 'to send away,' and the animal returns to the spirit world.
>
> And after she killed it, the woman put the skull of the panther in a tree so that it could see itself when it returned… It would see that she had killed it for that reason and it would bring life back to this once-beautiful place. (110-111)

Firstly, this story illuminates the relational kinship structures, between humans and non-humans, that animate and undergird Taiga culture. Writing about numerous Indigenous communities in the U.S., Kyle Powys Whyte has explained that indigenous "kinship networks" include a sense of identity that is "associated with the environment and a sense of responsibility to care for the environment. There is no privileging of humans as unique in having agency or intelligence, so one's identity and caretaking responsibility as a human includes the philosophy that nonhumans have their own agency, spirituality, knowledge, and intelligence" (127). Thus, humans ought to take responsibility to be respectful of nonhuman ways of knowing. Omishto's account of this creation story suggests that such views are central to Taiga belief systems as well.

This cosmological narrative not only speaks to the operations of kinship within the Taiga clan, but it also introduces the idea that the panther, for Omishto and her community, functions as an "earth being"—a term employed by Marisol de la Cadena to describe a "contentious object whose mode of presentation is not homogenous with the ordinary mode

of existence of the objects thereby identified" (50). According to de la Cadena, this term represents sacred beings, such as mountains and rivers, which confound and disavow the separation between "nature" and "humanity," the dualistic concepts that have historically structured the "modern world." While these beings might be categorized as "things" or "natural resources" within dominant Western politics or science, earth beings disrupt the monopoly of discourses that provincialize "the universe" as a world inhabited by humans who are distanced from "nature" (de la Cadena 345). In doing so, they create the possibility for an "indigenous cosmopolitics" that foregrounds the way that multiple, divergent worlds ("cosmos") co-exist and can engage with dominant political thought. Cosmopolitics, in other words, is an orientation that works to create openness towards every being that may be affected by a political decision or action. Although it does not advocate treating each being as equal (normatively or ontologically), it hinges on the belief that all beings can make interventions that shape the political process.

While Cadena's deployment of this term arises from her research in a Latin American indigenous context, Joni Adamson has taken up this line of thought to examine how the presence of "earth-beings" can be found in contemporary Native American fiction.[142] Her reading of Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*, for example, highlights the way that Erdrich often depicts "transformational characters" who "disorder the boundaries between human and animal" (28). More recently, Adamson has also applied this term to Hogan's 2009 novel, *People of the Whale*, examining how the novel depicts whales, with their bodies "covered with barnacle life and sea creatures," as akin to planets within the universe. "The whale's eye," she explains, "calls upon readers to engage in a comparative ethnography that

[142] Specifically, she worked with the Quechua from the Andes.

reveals the ways in which multiple species conduct their interrelational lives. The novel shows that for many indigenous peoples, these *worlds* have never ceased to exist" (40, emphasis mine). Like these sacred beings, which point to the existence of other living worlds, the panther in the Hogan's novel creates a dialogue between different worlds and forces discussion between opposing cosmopolitical perspectives (as is illustrated by the novel's investment in comparing Western legal frameworks with the operations of tribal justice).[143]

Even more specifically, the panther also operates in the novel as an earth being that illuminates the multi-scaled connections between breath, weather, and climate. Omishto communicates this point through her explanation that the Taiga word for panther is "sisa": "It is our name for them. It means godlike, all-powerful. The cat is the animal that came here before us and it taught us the word, Oni, which is the word for life itself, for wind and breath…" (73). Omishto's observations draw our attention to the fact that Taiga epistemology posits a direct relationship between the panther's existence and the earth's atmospheric conditions (that is, the circulation of wind and breath), which enable life to flourish. Like Inuk theorizations of "sila," which emphasize the relationship between an individual's ability to breathe, a community's collective continuance, and the integrity of the climate and weather systems, "sisa" indexes an Indigenous recognition of the enmeshment

[143] Importantly, according to de la Cadena, when contemporary indigenous people or politicians put earth-beings at the center of their actions, they see these creatures not as proposals for what "is" or "what ought to be." Rather, earth-beings provoke thought, or to use Isabelle Stengers' terms, they "slow down reasoning" and create an opportunity to arouse a slightly different awareness of the problems and situations under analysis.

between people and all other relations, with the earth's atmosphere and climate acting as particularly important sites for the generation of life.[144]

The panther, then, acts as not only a keystone species for the Florida everglades ecosystem, but as a *cultural and ontological keystone*, structuring Taiga worldview in foundational and inextricable ways. Understanding the panther in this way raises crucial implications for Western, ecological frameworks to contend with. For if the panther is not just a keystone species, but a sacred being, then the panther's elimination not only affects the ecosystem of the Florida everglades, but it also extends into and threatens Taiga worldviews and ways of living. This insight draws our attention to the ways in which the death of particular species can undermine the continuity and identity of human groups whose integrity derives from their relations with these other beings. The extinction of these significant, other beings marks not only the loss of human links to "nature" (as Ursula Heise has discussed) but also the destruction of everyday worlds (co-)inhabited by humans. In this sense, the extinction of nonhumans may negate particular possibilities of being "human" or of being a part of the Taiga community. Thus, the "indirect consequences" that comprise the trophic cascade, in other words, stretch far beyond its common parameters. Recognizing this forces us to dwell with our actions and their consequences, and in doing so, encourages us to consider how we can begin to wind back the current rate of extinctions. This kind of reorientation is absolutely vital in the Anthropocene, a time characterized by the extensive unravelling of lifeways on a planetary scale.

The (New) Subjects of Extinction

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[144] Sila, according to Zoe Todd, "became associated with incorporeal power […] since not only does sila—through breath—convey the energy that drives life, but sila also manifests itself as tangible weather phenomena, such as the slightest touch of breeze, or as the flesh-stripping power of a storm" (12).

This radical expansion is only part of the work that Hogan's trophic cascade emplottment can perform, however. While much of the novel, as I have shown, considers how the logic of the trophic cascade might be adopted and amplified to incorporate unexpected loss, Hogan's narrative concludes by introducing the possibility that extinction, and its cascades of loss, might also kindle new modes of and possibilities for subjectivity. The idea that processes of extinction might also result in the generation of new subjects (rather than simply erase or diminish them) has been explored by a range of cultural critics, including Kathryn Yusoff, Claire Colebrook, and Audra Mitchell. In her article, "Beyond Biodiversity and Species: Problematizing Extinction," Mitchell examines how scientific and public discourses surrounding the current mass extinction event have tended to focus their attention on the decline or absence of species and biodiversity. Drawing on insights from across the humanities, she suggests that the dynamics of extinction can also produce a diverse range of subjects: "[E]xtinction is not defined solely by the destruction of species and biodiversity," she writes, "it is a destructive/creative force that generates diversity—not only through biological processes such as speciation, but also through the cultural transformations and productions intertwined with them. 'Going extinct' is not equivalent to disappearing; it involves a range of processes that produce, transform and deform a diverse group of subjects" (24-5). With this framing in place, Mitchell examines how each of these "subjects" raises specific ethical challenges and thus creates opportunities for cosmopolitical transformation by slowing down the rush to find universal "solutions" for the scientific management of life. Attending to these new subjects, moreover, allows us to identify the exclusions and inequalities embedded in dominant conservationist discourses and identify possibilities for plural ethico-political responses to mass extinction.

In its final pages, *Power* similarly explores this unexpected aspect of species extinction. In the aftermath of testifying at both the federal and tribal proceedings, Omishto begins to question how the Taiga way of life will persist in light of Ama's banishment from the community. Throughout the novel, Ama embodied the knowledge and practices of the Taiga community, serving as a guide and mentor for Omishto, who otherwise had no contact with Taiga culture and customs. When Ama is first introduced, for example, Omishto explains that she "still swears by the old time beliefs, and she believes in all the Taiga stories, that they are true, that they are real … She lives in a natural way at the outside edge of our lives, and she 'keeps up relations,' as she says, with nature and the spirit world." (13, 15).[145] Ama's forced departure, however, jeopardizes the continuity of Taiga worldviews, pushing Omishto to more deeply consider her role in helping in carrying on traditional ways. Nevertheless, Omishto, throughout much of the novel remains torn between her desire to fit in with the world populated by school and modern "houses and highways" and the old world, which she knows is threatened by these Western developments: "I know our survival depends on who I am and who I will become. But this is all too large for me. It makes me want to run away …" (199).[146]

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[145] The narrative includes numerous details that strengthen the parallels and ties between Ama and the panthers. In one moment, Omishto comments that "some people said she's met and married a panther, and now she was an animal come back to observe us to see if our manner of worldly conduct toward them was right and kind (22).

[146] At the same time that Omishto's transformation challenges dominant perspectives of extinction, *Power* also intervenes in debates relating to the most effective channel (via appeals to the individual v. the system) for addressing anthropogenic climate change. On the one hand, critics argue that climate change has been set into motion by large scale processes or events, such as colonialism, capitalism, globalization, and is sustained by these exploitative systems. A systemic, top-down approach is therefore necessary for effectively intervening in Anthropogenic climate shift, rather than individual actions, which are too minor to make a real difference. And, in fact, as many have pointed out, the belief in individual environmental stewardship has been exploited by neoliberal programs, which place the onus on the individual to make a difference through the further purchase and consumption of "green"

Omishto's ambivalence has led certain critics to argue that Ama's attempt at intervening in the destruction of her world by slaying the panther "fails in [its] purpose" (156). Lydia Cooper writes that "Ama's passionate pursuit of regeneration through violence, her fervor 'like a woman chasing her God,' in the end is revealed to be tragic, devastating to humanity and nature alike" (153). Cooper qualifies this interpretation by explaining that Omishto eventually rejects Ama's approach and instead turns to the community of Taiga elders: "In the end, Omishto is saved only when she rejects Ama's act and example and leaves Ama's house to join the Native community at Kili, symbolically refusing to valorize Ama's violent atonement …" (154). While it is true that Omishto ultimately decides to disavow the Western world and embrace the traditional ways of her elders, this decision stems directly from—not despite—Ama's actions, which triggers the novel's storyline. Ama, in other words "extincts" herself—suffers a social death—to help Omishto embrace Taiga

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products. (See Stacy Alaimo's "Sustainability This, Sustainability That.") On the other hand, some critics argue that individual action can in fact make a difference. Steve Westlake's research on this topic draws on sociological research to examine how the powerful effects of "social influence" demonstrate that "doing something bold like giving up flying can have a wider knock-on effect by influencing others and shifting what's viewed as 'normal'" (3). While these conversations remain far from settled, Hogan's novel foregrounds an aspect of this conversation that is largely ignored: that there are in fact multiple "worlds" at risk, and interventionist approaches must be scaled accordingly. As *Power* shows, Ama's individual actions do in fact save a "world"—the Taiga world. Omishto remarks on this perspective by noting that, according to Ama, "there was an order to things, a mystery of how every single thing worked together with the rest, merged and fitted like it was all one great body. … [Ama] believes that our every act, word, and thought is of great significance in the round shape of this world and there are great consequences for each. Because of this, we do not have the right to live in any way we desire." Therefore, while Ama acts at the scale of the individual, her actions nevertheless work across various, larger scales (ones that subsume her world). Hogan's novel thus expresses the importance of thinking about how environmentalist debates articulate within indigenous contexts, and with different cosmological perspectives. Because indigenous cosmopolitics stresses the reality of different worlds (worlds that exist at different scales), we must also consider whose world we are attempting to save, and how it might be possible to save multiple worlds at once. My coda will think further upon this question.

culture. From this perspective, her conversion toward the novel's end demonstrates the generative capacities of extinction.

Hogan dramatizes the underexplored aspect of extinction in the novel's concluding chapter, which establishes a connection between the panther's death (and Ama's expulsion) and Omishto's ultimate acceptance of Taiga epistemology. In this moment of the narrative, which is preceded by a scene that depicts Omishto experiencing a rebirth of sorts, our protagonist recounts a dream in which her identity merges with that of the Florida panther: "When I go to bed, I dream the panther, its legs bent, its teeth poor. I feel dizzy with scent, the smell of it and of blood. This, too, comes to me. In the dream it is standing in tall grasses, stalking with its night-shining eyes, lean now, healthy in its home inside my mind where it is closed in by whatever I am, who I belong to …" (211).[147] While Omisthto had previously expressed uncertainty over her relationship to her Indigenous identity, this moment registers as her embrace of Indigenous modes of relationality, such as usage of clan markers (such as bear, turtle, or in this case, panther). Heidi Bohaker explains that this form of identification has been important for numerous Indigenous communities, such as the Anishinaabe, who operate through "kinship networks" where people "conceived of themselves as related to and having kin obligations toward those who shared the other-than-human progenitor being" (25). These networks were crucial for "social and political life . . . [they] shaped marriage and alliance patterns and facilitated long distance travel; access to community resources . . . [and] operated as an important component of Anishinaabe

[147] At one point, she describes this feeling of rebirth as follows: "In the mornings, I wake newly born, full of life, yet unable to tell what I hold as if my body is a sacred container of stories, of storms recalled, of the smooth teeth of animals and the words of ancestors" (230).

collective identities" (25-29).[148] Omishto's dream, then, speaks to the way that the panther's death actually results in the eventual embrace of her Taiga identity, which she had so long struggled to find and accept.

After embracing her identity as a member of the Taiga clan, Omishto moves away from the developed suburban sprawl where she had lived and joins the community at Kili swamp. As such, Omishto's story parallels that of the Panther Woman from Taiga cosmology, who similarly travels from one world and into another with the hope of reinvigorating the worlds that she traverses. In the old world at Kili swamp, Omishto begins to learn the creation songs and dances that have existed across generations within the Taiga community, songs and dances that "say the world will go on living" (235). In doing so, she breathes new life into the diminished Taiga community and into the clan's totem, the Florida panther. This action, moreover, foreshadows the transformational capacities of alternative (performative) modes of engagement with the discourse and processes of extinction, a proposition that I spend more time discussion later in this chapter.

Far from entrenching a politics of tragedy and decline, as many narratives of extinction are prone to do, *Power* thus demonstrates that ethical engagement with the various, unexpected subjects of extinction may inspire new forms of community, relationality, and responsiveness in the face of this world-changing process. And it is with this interest in new forms of community, relationality and responsiveness in mind that I now turn to Henrietta Rose-Innes's *Green Lion*—a novel that takes these issues as its primary concern.

—Part II—

[148] Though neither Omishto nor Hogan is Anishnaabe, the novel suggests that Taiga worldviews are structured by similar kinship networks. Omishto notes, for example, that each time a Taiga human is born, a partner-panther is also born.

Henrietta Rose-Innes and Her South African Sense of Place

Like Linda Hogan, Henrietta Rose-Innes is often read as an author interested in questions of narrative, ecology, and the history of colonialism. Born in Cape Town in 1971, Rose-Innes's fiction typically explores issues stemming from this biologically rich region of the world. In an interview with Gail Fincham, she attributes her interests in ecology and her environmental literary imagination to the distinct ecology and diversity of the cape region, where she was raised: "Growing up, [I] often walked on Table Mountain, or went on family holidays to national parks. … There was always a strong affinity for wilderness" (3). Such experiences deeply shaped her writerly interests, placing her in a far-reaching lineage of South African writers dedicated to critically examining the relationship between identity and the South African landscape. Rose-Innes has honed her craft through several writing fellowships and numerous residencies (through the Rockefeller Center, the Akademie Schloss Solitude, and the University of Cape Town, to name just a few). More recently, she has earned a PhD in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia.

Rose-Innes has pursued questions of human-environmental relations across numerous of her novels. Her first novella, *Shark's Egg* (2000), for example, takes place against Cape Town's seas and the city's aquariums. Often analyzed as a coming of age narrative, the novel explores the protagonist's attempts at making sense of her feelings of isolation and loneliness (after she begins to drift apart from a childhood friend), while simultaneously recognizing her enmeshment within an immersive and expansive ecology.[149] The novel dramatizes these concerns through Anna's various trips to the Cape Town

[149] Rose-Innes has explained, "I have always been drawn to certain institutional spaces like aquariums, galleries, museums—spaces that allow one to engage with an expansive world while remaining a solitary observer" (16).

Aquarium, where she wanders through the displays and reflects on the Aquarium's spatial arrangements, which simultaneously immerse her in an oceanic ecology, yet shield her from her aquatic environs. Similar concerns are explored in her second book, *Rock Alphabets*, which details the story of two "wild-children" found in the Cederberg Wilderness Area. Throughout this novel, Rose-Innes explores how their re-introduction into Western civilization leaves them feeling more isolated than ever before. As the novel chronicles their attempts at returning to their place of origin, Ros-Innes excavates how one's sense of self is powerfully shaped by palimpsests of place, and the colonial histories that penetrate these sites.

In 2011, Henrietta Rose-Innes published *Nineveh*, which catapulted her into a more mainstream international market. In *Nineveh*, Katya Grubbs, the proprietor of an ethical pest control service in Cape Town—she does not exterminate vermin but removes and relocates them—is contracted by an affluent property developer, Mr. Brand, to rid a new housing development, the titular "Nineveh," of an insect infestation. The plot revolves around her gradual discovery that her estranged father, Len Grubbs, an exterminator from whom she learnt the trade of pest wrangling before setting out on her own more gentle path, and who was previously contracted by Mr. Brand to clear Nineveh, has established a network of subterranean activity in the unoccupied estate. He presides over a secret tunnel that allows him to cart off and sell materials stripped from the newly built houses to a community living in the surrounding wetlands, while at the same time providing a passageway into the estate for the beetles that swarm whenever the rains come, thus keeping him—until the arrival of Katya, at least—in a job. The novel thus explores how we come to terms with unexpected and sometimes undesirable animal neighbors in urban spaces, providing a Gothic, though

ultimately optimistic, vision for how the natural world is both irrepressible and deeply intertwined with the human world.

As an "informal sequel" (or "companion piece") to *Nineveh*, *Green Lion* further explores the ever-shifting relationships between humans and non-humans within the urban ecologies of the Anthropocene.[150] *Green Lion* opens with drifter Constantine, who is on his way to retrieve the belongings of his childhood friend and one-time crush, zookeeper Mark Carolissen. Mark lies bandaged in hospital after a mauling by a rare black-maned lion (the Cape Lion) that is one of a breeding pair that was under his charge. Dmitri, the male of the pair, has been put down, leaving lioness Sekhmet as the last of her species. While Con is initially hesitant to collect Mark's belongings, Con's girlfriend, Elyse, tells him that it's "the human thing to do"—a turn of phrase that feels less clearly complimentary as the book proceeds. Upon recovering Mark's belongings and delivering them to his mother, Con takes up Mark's job at the zoo, where he becomes the caretaker for Sekhmet. As caretaker, Con negotiates the pressures of helping the zoo stay afloat financially. This present-day narrative is intermittently penetrated by flashbacks from Con's memory, relaying his adolescent relationship with Mark, which was indelibly transfigured by the unexpected disappearance and death of Mark's sister—a traumatic experience that shapes Con's muted and lethargic approach to life in the novel's present day.

Green Lion has consistently been characterized as the flipside to *Nineveh*, providing a much bleaker outlook on the Anthropocene. Where *Nineveh* was praised for its examination of how the natural world is productively intertwined with the human world, numerous critics have commented on how *Green Lion*, due to its overarching interest in animal extinction,

[150] This is part of what she calls an "informal trilogy." She is currently writing the last installment in the series.

melancholically dwells on the disruptive consequences of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. In the novel's slightly futuristic Cape Town, humans are alienated from each other and from the non-human world, left longing for a "teeming landscape to cure them of their loneliness in it" (4). As Rose-Innes puts its it in an interview on Short Story Day Africa,

> *Green Lion* looks at the other extreme of the human experience with nature: how we are growing more removed from the wild, and more alone and lonely in our humanness; and how, as this happens, we mythologise and perhaps fetishise these creatures that no longer share our spaces. I think both of these processes are true and ongoing; it's part of the complexity and contradiction of ecology. Green Lions are the wild things that we will have to live without, or know only in artificial or symbolic forms. The novel is about our reactions to this loss. ("An Interview")

Rose-Innes further reinforces such an interpretation when she comments that, "*Green Lion* itself does not allow for much of that kind of ambiguity. What it leaves us with is the sense that much of our natural world will linger on only as phantoms or fetishes in the human psyche" (7). According to this take, the novel leaves little room for understanding the sixth extinction as anything but a tragic decline or downfall, one which will leave the human species in a state of haunted isolation.[151]

The Black-Maned Lion, Cape Town, and the Trophic Cascade in *Green Lion*

We see this sense of isolation play out most clearly in the novel through the story of the Cape lion (Panthera leo melanochaitus)—an animal central to South Africa's ecology and its culture. [152] The novel begins with the termination of the last male Cape lion, using this instance of extinction to jumpstart the novel's central storyline, which (as with *Power*) unfolds in a way that mimics the structural logic of the trophic cascade. Within its ecosystem, the Cape Lion occupied the role of an apex predator, "regulating the population of mainly large

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[151] As my reading will make clear, I do not necessarily agree with such an understanding of the novel. My reading is more interested in—and will thus underscore—the novel's utopian features, which are particularly robust in the novel's concluding chapters.
[152] The Cape Lions was hunted to extinction by the mid-nineteenth century.

mammal herbivores within a terrestrial ecosystem" (ALERT). And like other lion species in continental Africa, the Cape Lion was one of the few predators (besides humans) "capable of preying on the largest of Africa's herbivores including elephants (Loxodonta africana), giraffes (Giraffa camelopardalis), and hippopotamuses (Hippopotamus amphibius)" (ALERT).

Like *Power*, *Green Lion* stretches the parameters of the trophic cascade into a larger socio-cultural ecology, one which is uncovered through Con's perspective in the novel. Rose-Innes communicates the pervasiveness of the lion's absence/presence across South Africa's cultural and geological terrain via unexpected references to the lion, which appears in various and surprising guises. After learning about Dmitri's death, for example, Con reflects for the first time on the fact that the fifty-rand note features the image of a lion: "For a while he looked at the very fine engraving … The animal scowled to the right on one side, while Mandela stared to the left on the other, amused" (271). Instances such as this one allow Rose-Innes to draw attention to the ways that the loss of such a culturally significant species might crop up through seemingly banal, quotidian interactions, such as the exchange of currency. Or, to take another example, while strolling around Cape Town, Con constantly encounters the Cape Lion through the looming presence of Lion's Head, a mountain in Cape Town situated between Table Mountain and Signal Hill. Throughout the novel, Con habitually walks past Lion's Head, remarking on the way that this geological feature, which is shaped like a resting lion, assists in helping him orient himself within the city, and moreover, anchors his identity as a South African. In this instance, the (now extinct) Cape lion features as a prominent feature of the landscape, haunting Con as he traverses the city. Similar to the Florida panther within Taiga epistemology, the Cape lion thus operates as a cultural and ecological keystone for the denizens of Cape Town. While I've highlighted only two

instances of the lion's unexpected absence/presence in the novel, Rose-Innes populates the text with such instances, illuminating how species loss makes itself felt in surprising, poignant, and unexpected ways.

In addition to these particular instances, Rose-Innes implements interesting formal decisions to emphasize the historical and cultural significance of lions on an extradiegetic level. Each of the novel's sections begins with an epigraph or historical reference to a lion, such as medieval allegories or ancient Egyptian litanies.[153] While many of these sources reflect the cross-cultural significance of the lion species, Rose-Innes also draws on a number of South African sources, such as Khoisan songs and stories, which were recorded by anthropologists in the early 1900s. Citing an extract from "||Kabbo Tells me His Dream," Rose-Innes invites readers to contemplate the significance of the lion for South Africa's indigenous populations. The novel further reinforces this on a formal level by naming the book's chapters after an (often vanished) animal species, such as the rooikat, quagga, meerkat and dassie.[154] Yet rather than physically populate each chapter with the animal inspiring its appellation, readers typically only encounter these animals in a figurative or metaphorical sense. The chapter titled "Lobster," for instance, features no actual crustaceans; rather, the title refers to the color of Con's skin after he experiences a horrible sunburn while camping with Mark on Table Mountain: "When his mother opened the door, she gasped and said, 'My god, what happened? You look like a lobster!'" (229). In naming her chapters after dwindling, vanished, or otherwise absent species, which only "appear" in

[153] For example, she cites from the "The Litany of Sekhmet," an inscription from the Temple of Horns at Edfu (dated *c.* 237-57 BCE)

[154] In South Africa today, the rooikat is not extinct. Rose-Innes's novel, which takes place in a slightly uncanny version of Cape Town, lists the extinction of numerous species that are not in fact yet extinct in our world.

metaphorical forms, Rose-Innes allows readers to experience the novel's rendering of a diminished world on an extradiegetic level—as we read the novel, we search for the animals named in the section or chapter titles, only to discover them in a referential or spectral form.

De-extinction and Biocapitalism

It is against this backdrop of pervasive loss that *Green Lion* explores the various conservationist movements and modalities that arise in response to the trophic cascade as an expansive structure of feeling. The novel, in other words, can be read as exploring and speculatively responding to the following important questions: How does impending loss—particularly of keystone species—catalyze a renewed restoration ecology? What remedies might humankind imagine to reverse ecological destruction? What kinds of wilderness can and should be resurrected? And how are these pathways toward conservation implicated in (and potentially products of) colonialism in South Africa? Thus, while *Power* devotes much of its narrative space to amplifying and productively challenging the structure of the trophic cascade, *Green Lion* takes up the challenge of examining how we respond to this expanded cascade of loss.

The first conservationist approach that Con encounters at the Cape Town Zoo is the ecological practice of "de-extinction," sometimes known as "resurrection ecology." Importantly, Rose-Innes grounds this examination in the physical locale of the zoo, a space long-identified in South Africa with projects of de-extinction. In the novel's concluding notes, Rose-Innes explains that her fictionalized zoo was inspired by—and represents an amalgam of—two prominent historical zoos of the Western Cape: the old Groote Schuur Zoo in Cape Town and the Tygerberg Zoo, which sat just outside of Stellenbosch. The first of these, the Groote Schuur Zoo, was established in 1931, at the request of Cecil Rhodes, a British imperialist, who served as the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony in the late

nineteenth century.[155] Rhodes established this zoo as a free attraction to residents of Cape Town, particularly to display large felines, like lions and cheetahs. Eventually, however, the zoo shut down due to as a result of the financial burden that the Apartheid government faced and as a consequence of the increase in animal welfare standards. In response to the Groote Schuur Zoo's closure, the Tygerberg Zoo was opened in 1979. It came to international attention when one of the zoo's founders, John Spence, found what appeared to be a Cape lion (named Simon) in captivity in Russia. The zoo bred Simon with another lion in order to bring the lion cubs back to South Africa. In addition to this attempt at species revivalism, the Tygerberg Zoo offered numerous educational programs, often centered on the revival of rare and endangered species. In 1998, for example, Tygerberg celebrated the birth of a baby Namaqua Speckled, "the world's tiniest tortoise" (Davis 3). Despite the relative success of these projects, the zoo permanently closed its doors in 2012.[156] Together, then, these zoos speak to the often-problematic interplay of colonialism, conservation, and environmental justice across South Africa's history. For this reason, Con describes the zoo as a "strange mirage [with] bright new buildings floating on grim foundations" (17).

These projects of de-extinction come alive in the novel through Con's conversation with the zoo's director, Amina, who informs Con about the program's goals and history.

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[155] In the same year that *Green Lion* was published, activists in South Africa began protesting a statute at the University of Cape Town that commemorated Cecil Rhodes. After the statue was successfully de-installed, the University began considering possible (less prominent) venues for its new location, one of which was the Old Zoo (which is where Rose-Innes houses Cecil Rhodes in the novel). In this way, Rose-Innes's novel presages the racial and social unrest that occurred in Cape Town in 2015.

[156] Like the Florida Everglades, the area of Tygerberg is subject to encroaching commercialization and development, which has contributed to South Africa's issues with habitat extinction.

Over the course of the conversation, Con learns that the zoo has successfully back-bred quaggas, a subspecies of plains zebra that died off in the nineteenth century.[157] Inspired by their success with quagga resurrection, they aim to do the same with lions:

> 'I thought they were extinct.'
> 'Oh, they are, but you know there were Cape lions all over Europe, even after they were shot out here. In zoos, circuses … The genes are still circulating out there, but diluted. The idea is to find individual specimens that have black-maned traits, breed them back. … We got our boy in a Russian circus, Sekhmet in Namibia in a safari park. Canned hunting, you know? (21)

As intimated in this conversation, de-extinction is a mode of environmental conservation that relies on traditional methods of back-breeding to restore an approximation of presently extinct species. Notoriously, this technique was deployed by the Heck brothers, Nazi scientists who attempted to revive the aurochs in Germany in the late 1920s by manipulating and combining the genetic material that had been preserved in domesticated cattle.[158] (And, interestingly, it was Lutz Heck who first suggested, in his book *Grosswild in Etoshaland*, that careful selective breeding with the plains zebra could produce an animal resembling the extinct quagga.)[159] Yet as this passage hints, practices of de-extinction cannot easily be separated from problematic colonial pasts that caused species extinction in the first place, such as "canned hunting" and the collection of rare species by European trophy hunters. In a bizarre twist, the practices that led to South Africa's extinction crisis in the first place are now touted as possible sites of hope for projects of species revivalism.

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[157] The Quagga Project was developed in the 1980s to breed back the quagga. See this website for further information: https://www.quaggaproject.org

[158] The novel cites this history in a scene I will attend to momentarily: "'The Nazis did something similar,' pink-faced Mr Nelson-Pick remarked brightly. 'With the aurochs — you know, the wild cattle. Interesting parallels. Nationalist politics, and so on. They thought they were suitably Aryan animals'" (127).

[159] While still in developing stages, there are several "genomic conservation" groups actively working toward resurrecting a number of extinct species, such as the mammoth, the ibex, the passenger pigeon, and the Caribbean monk seal.

The novel further fleshes out the relationship between colonialism, globalization, and de-extinction in a subsequent scene between Con and a group of foreign investors who have come to visit the zoo. In this scene, Con fields questions pertaining to how and why the lion resurrection project should continue, particularly in light of Mark's injury and the Dmitri's extermination:

> "So tell me, Mr Marais …"
> "Why on earth would we want them back?"
> 'Because they're precious,' he said. 'Because once something is extinct, it's lost forever. You can't bring it back.'
> 'But is that not precisely what you are trying to do here, with this project? Bring back something that is rightly dead and gone?'
> The other suits were surrounding him too now: 'And what about cloning?' Mr Myer said. 'With modern genetics, we can recreate animals from scratch, surely? No need for this old-fashioned hit-and-miss approach.'
> 'You know, there are people who say this whole thing is a waste of time and resources, with all the important existing species we're losing . . .'
> 'They're doing amazing things with mammoth DNA!'
> '. . . that there never was a separate black-maned species in the first place, that anything we breed now will just be a funny-looking lion. That they're nothing special.' …
> 'Well, gentlemen,' he said mildly, 'I'm no geneticist. But Sekhmet seems special to me.' (128)

This rapid-fire exchange touches on a number of issues relating to extinction discourse: How do we determine when a species is "rightly dead and gone"? Who has the authority to make this call? Is an animal that has been bred back into existence the "same" as the lost species it is designed to substitute? How is "sameness" defined (by looks, behavior, genetic similarity)? Does de-extinction capture the ineffable qualities that make non-human animals, like Sekhmet, "special"? While each of these questions merits sustained attention, I want to focus on the biocapitalist questions that this dialogue raises, as they often index the destructive colonialist tendencies that lead to mass extinction in the first place.[160]

[160] While my discussion will focus on de-extinction and the question of back-breeding, it's helpful to note that many scientists use the practices of de-extinction for genetic-engineering

More recently, practices of de-extinction have been guided by specific knowledge about the genome of the extinct species, which is often drawn from molecular biology and the study of genetics. Using genetic code that has been archived, recovered, or reconstructed (often from fossil remains), scientists have attempted to engineer vanished animals back into existence. As Mr. Myer enthusiastically suggests, these practices have come together through the technologies of cloning. The idea of cloning a keystone species gained traction as a result of the work done by organizations like MAGE (multiplex automated genomic engineering) and Revive and Restore, both of which promise to resurrect extinct species whose genome is known or can be reconstructed from fossil remains. The mention of "mammoth DNA" in this passage, in fact, explicitly points to more recent endeavors by the organizations MAGE and Revive and Restore, both of which are currently spearheading an operation that intends to re-populate vast tracts of tundra and boreal forest in Eurasia and North America. The Revive and Restore project explains the rationale for this project as follows: "Breakthrough advances in genomic biotechnology are presenting the possibility of bringing back long-extinct species—or at least 'proxy' species with traits and ecological functions similar to the extinct originals. The Woolly Mammoth has emerged as a leading candidate for this work" ("Wooly Mammoth Revival"). The project thus relies upon the premise that restoring an absent keystone species might be beneficial to the ecosystem it has been re-introduced to—an idea that, as I discuss in the following section, has become exceptionally fraught in the Anthropocene.

We should be wary of the techno-capitalist logic that undergirds this formulation of an animal species, however. As Ashley Dawson explains, "Key to this [cloning] process is

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styles methods. For more, on this subject see Carrie Friese's book *Cloning Wildlife: Zoos, Captivity, and the Future of Endangered Animals.*

the conceptualization of animal species as bundles of genetic information, sequences of letters that can be stored on a computer. Animals (and humans, for that matter) are nothing more than genetic code, in this view, easily transposed into computer code" (95).[161] According to critics of de-extinction, this conservation strategy relies on the thoroughgoing manipulation and commodification of nature, and as such dovetails perfectly with biocapitalism. "De-extinction thus provides a mouth-watering opportunity for a new round of capital accumulation," Dawson writes, "based on generating and acquiring intellectual property rights over living organisms" (96). The passage intimates at the prevalence of this logic through the flippancy of Mr. Myer's comments, which erase any of the difficulty and ethical murkiness of the situation, and which suggests that "modern genetics" should be easily able to reproduce lost life.

These practices not only extend into the problematic hyper-valuation of animal life, but they translate into the extreme devaluation of human life. Rose-Innes articulates this aspect of "genomic conservation" through another conversation between Con and Amina, in which Amina describes how Mark's death has negatively affected the zoo's business:

> "We hope to *expand*," said Amina. "We'd like to *absorb* the quagga enclosures, have some of them in an area where the public can get close. The dassies are fun for now, but ultimately we'll keep our focus on extinctions. The quaggas, the black-maned lions. Like everywhere these days, the focus is on species loss, but we've got something different. We can give it a positive spin: animals brought back from death, you know? If we ever manage to breed there'll be space for the cubs … But this whole business has been very bad for fundraising, as you can imagine.'" (69, emphasis mine)[162]

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[161] De-extinction thus subscribes to the logic that, if human beings are the prime authors of extinction, then we can also engineer our way out of ecological disaster.

[162] An advertisement for the Lion House reads: "*Back from Extinction! Come and meet our breeding pair, Dmitri and Sekhmet — the first black-maned lions in the Cape since 1858*" (17).

Amina's language in this passage captures some of the key elements of a capitalist mode of production: it must "expand" and "absorb" in order to grow and survive. While the zoo initially operates in a more traditional manner, housing common species like dassies, its ultimate aim is to capitalize on and commodify the extinction crisis, putting a "positive spin" on mass species death.

Such an approach exemplifies the ways in which capitalism, as Naomi Klein explains, seizes on political calamities to further its accumulative aims. Klein's insights on disaster capitalism help us understand how the extinction crisis is transmuted into an opportunity to ratchet up the commodification of life itself—and all in the name of conservation. Anything that interferes with the zoo's financial growth (in this case, it is Mark's accidental mauling) is, in turn, understood as "bad business," or as an inconvenience that must be smoothed over. For this reason, Mark is neglected by his employers at the zoo, quickly dismissed as an "animal nutter" (106). Ultimately, however, it seems that the costs of de-extinction practices prove to be too high for the Cape Town zoo. After the investors depart, Amina considers that she may end up selling Sekhmet to a park, where a hunter would pay "good money … to be the person to kill the last black-maned lion in the world" (133). As was the case for the Groote Schuur Zoo and the Tygerberg Zoo, then, de-extinction proves to be a dead end for conservation efforts in South Africa, as Rose-Innes understands it.

Rewilding and Environmental Injustice

At the same time that novel pursues the complexities of de-extinction, it also tackles some of the difficulties surrounding the environmentalist approach of rewilding. Introduced in the late 1990s by biologists Michael Soulé and Reed Noss, rewilding acknowledges the crisis in conservation provoked by dramatic defaunation. The concept was based on the

then-radical idea that large, wide-ranging, usually carnivorous animals play a key role in preserving the diversity and resilience of ecosystems. In most cases, these keystone species (such as lions), once viewed by human beings as a direct threat, have been displaced or driven to the edge of extinction. Rewilding often entails the restoration of huge tracts of wilderness through the creation of large, linked core protected areas and the reintroduction of keystone species into such new wilderness. As imagined by its advocates, rewilding would not replace traditional conservation measures intended to protect the existing indigenous species of particular bioregions, but would complement such efforts by seeking to restore levels of biodiversity that have been eradicated from such sites in recent centuries.[163]

Rewilding appears in *Green Lion* as a conservation strategy developed and enforced by the Public Parks and the Department of Tourism. In an effort to preserve the ecology of Table Mountain and create an environment amenable to the return of indigenous plants and animals. Through a flashback from his youth, Con recalls the fence's contentious development:

> Con was twelve when they first started talking about the fence. The first section wasn't controversial. It was right up at the top, out of sight from the bottom of the mountain, fencing off a section for the tourists around the cable-car station and the little paths that ringed it. … 'They're doing it for conservation,' he said. … They were going to do great things, up there on the sensitive tabletop. Stock with the antelope, zebra, baboons, breeding pairs of eagles, all kinds of rare and endangered creatures. The fence would keep all the animals safe from harm. Given massive species loss everywhere else, it was the only plan that made sense. (90)

Much like she does with the Cape Town zoo, Rose-Innes draws upon and slightly distorts South Africa's real-world conservation and rewilding efforts, this time as they relate to Table Mountain National Park. Conservation efforts for Table Mountain began in the 1950s and

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[163] For more scholarship on rewilding efforts in the Anthropocene, refer to the work of Laura J. Martin, particularly the article "Designing Autonomy: Opportunities for New Wildness in the Anthropocene."

60s, when Table Mountain was declared a National Monument by South Africa's National Monuments board. Following high fire incidence in the 1970s, environmentalists advocated for a further expansion of this protected area, which became known as the Cape Peninsula Protected Natural Environment (CPPNE) area, established in 1989. Today, the protection and management of Table Mountain is spearheaded by SANParks (South African National Parks), which officially designated Table Mountain a National Park in 1991—a designation granted by then president, Nelson Mandela. And as Rose-Innes portrays in this passage, much of this push toward rewilding stems from a desire to protect and restore the mountain's unique biodiversity, which includes a variety of species such as eagles, zebra, baboons, and "all kinds of rare and endangered creatures" (95). These creatures, as the passage suggests, will not only aid in restoring the local ecosystem, but they will draw tourists to the area with their charismatic appeal.

Conservation projects like this one, however, are often haunted by troubling social injustice issues. This has often proven to be the case in South Africa, where public fascination with charismatic megafauna (such as "The Big Five") can work—and often has worked—to justify the displacement and poor treatment of local communities, particularly for the develop-ment of national parks. Historical precedents for this tendency can be found in the government takeover of land for the creation of the Pilanesberg and Marakele national parks (the latter founded in 1994, the year of the transition to majority rule). *Green Lion* envisions how this past might come to be repeated in the future as a result of rewilding efforts in Cape Town, particularly as anthropogenic climate change accelerates the decline of habitable conditions for many of the (nonhuman) species endemic to the region. Con observes that shortly after the first sections of the fence were erected, more boundary-making followed, leading to the forced relocation of local communities:

> The fence was in the news: the Parks department was extending it, proposing new areas of the mountain to close off, pushing through ordinances. There were plans to build a luxury lodge at the top, next to the reservoir. Talk of tender fraud, bribes paid and favours granted. … They sat and watched the silver fence being looped around the mountain like a ribbon. Over the toes of Lion's Head, along its ribs. (44)

Together, these two excerpts illustrate the ways that rewilding approaches—in their excitement for the protection of charismatic critters—have frequently sidelined social justice issues.[164] Often, this occurs as a result of the influence and pressures of corrupt political investors and developers. Clearly aware of this issue, *Green Lion* communicates how rewilding projects, particularly when they are tied to ecotourism, are often designed to benefit "(overwhelmingly white) market leaders" and "black political elites" rather "than (poor) local people, a state of affairs recognized the world over" (Büscher 59). Conservation, in such cases, not only potentially sidelines social justice issues, but can act as a pretext for unsavory class and racial politics in a postapartheid state.

We can thus read the novel depiction of the Cape Town rewilding area, with its "luxury lodge," as an instance of Rob Nixon's theorization of the game lodge as an "antimodern" territori-al enclave in postapartheid South Africa. According to Nixon, the postapartheid game lodge operates as an anachronistic space that is at once "eternally natural," partaking of "a time outside of time, before and after the human, when megafauna rule," yet also "historically colonial," in that it caters to predominantly white patrons, featuring "self-effacing servants vanishing into the bush, white campfire camaraderie, male

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[164] At other points in the narrative, Rose-Innes describes the silver fence as a "necklace." This passage thus might be read as an allusion to the violent practice of "necklacing," in which a rubber tire is placed around a victim's chest, filled with petrol, and set on fire. Necklacing was used both by the apartheid government against activists, and by township residents to punish informants. (More recently, the practice comes up in reports of xenophobic violence.) By placing the necklace around Lion's Head mountain, Rose-Innes associates the violent legacies of colonialism with socially corrupt rewilding practices.

tales of derring-do." These two temporal registers are combined to market and sell the game lodge within a postapartheid marketplace, where it enacts a denial of South Africa's democratic transformation while simultaneously capitalizing on that transformation (181).

Similarly, in the novel, the Table Mountain reserve polices class and racial difference via the regimentation of land as both animal conservation area and tourist spectacle.[165] The novel exposes the various troubling aspects of the lodge by cataloguing Con's history with this contested space: growing up, Con first visits the game lodge during a protest organized by "shack-dwellers" living on the slopes of Lion's Head (97); he later visits the reserve with Mark and his family, who rent out a luxury campsite, fully equipped with "wilderness hosts" who cook and prepare their meals (261); and he finally returns to the reserve while working for the Lion Centre, where he encounters a pack of hunters who have obtained hunting permits by bribing the park's officials (256). By recounting these different experiences, Rose-Innes explores the various ways that South Africa's racial history articulates with its regional wildlife culture and the international marketing of nature.

In addition to examining the complicated land/property dynamics that attend rewilding, *Green Lion* also explores the often problematic fetishization of wilderness that sometimes accompanies rewilding through its introduction of the Green Lion Club. Con first encounters the Green Lion Club—a group of quirky, quasi-mystic environmental activists—when he meets Mossie, one of the club's members, while working at the Cape Town zoo. Shortly after their introduction, Mossie invites Con to visit one of their cultish club meetings, where members gather to gaze at looping wildlife videos.[166] In addition to this

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[165] Con reflects on the department's decision to grant hunting permits by commenting: "After all the Department publicity about preserving species, it seemed bizarre" (251).

[166] Con describes the cultish scene as follows: "The gathered people—fifteen or twenty—sat arranged around the screen, bathed in the blue glow, half on the floor and half on sofas and

"ritual celebration," the Green Lion Club is also devoted to having its members interact (via touch) with a variety of non-human animals, such as a yellow boa constrictor. Mossie explains that

> There's … *energy* we get from wild animals. There are so few really wild things left now. … It helps the people. To have that contact, yeah. You can understand that, can't you? I know you can. … To have the animal there. To touch it. Every person in that room—it helps them. It is something outside themselves. Their human lives." (149)

Key to the Green Lion Club's philosophy, this passage illuminates, is a nostalgia for a pristine natural world, for "wild things." This desire stretches back to late 19th and early 20th century European views on nature, which, in response to the changes wrought by industrialization, argue for the existence of deeper meanings and higher uses in nature than as mere material for the human economy. More recently, rewilding advocates, such as George Monbiot, have tapped into this desire, arguing that rewilding promises to restore not just wilderness ecosystems but also humanity's appreciation of the environment and hope for its future.[167] Achieving this dual aspiration, he suggests, rests on an understanding that conservation no longer must simply aim to protect and monitor an ever-dwindling ecology, but instead it must pursue the goal of returning nature to its "untouched" state, essentially reversing the tide of ecological time (along with its associated injustices). More often than not, as Ashley Dawson points out, this necessitates rekindling a human fascination with wildness through the utilization of the keystone species: "our ideas of what nature should be are transmuted *through the reintroduction of displaced or extinct keystone species* such as the wolf"

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armchairs […] The image of a whale floated into view, suspended in shafts of sunlight in deep blue water. The air deepened, thickened; everyone held their breath as the mourning of giants reverberated through the tiny house" (181). This cultish quality speaks to the mystical characteristics of resurrection ecology.

[167] Monibot's logic communicates the persistence of the wilderness discourse in American environmental approaches.

(Dawson, emphasis mine). Similar to de-extinction, rewilding draws upon both the charismatic appeal and ecological importance of the keystone species to mend ecological degradation.

Green Lion dramatizes the strategies of rewilding through the Green Lion Club's decision to break Sekhmet from the zoo in order to reintroduce her to the rewilded Table Mountain reserve—an act that would allegedly reverse the flow of ecological time and return it to its pristine state. Mossie spearheads this operation after spending the night with Con at the zoo, using the opportunity to steal the keys to Sekhmet's cage. Once Sekhmet is released, however, Mossie's plan tragically backfires: as they make their escape, Sekhmet mauls and kills a young girl who lived in one of the communities built up against the Table Mountain fence (264). In the aftermath of this death, the zoo hires a trio of trackers to locate, and if the situation requires, exterminate Sekhmet. And Con, too, engages in efforts to find and re-capture the lioness, but she is never found.

Through this scene, Rose-Innes prompts readers to contemplate the responsibility that rewilding efforts have toward both the community that surrounds the rewilded ecosystem and toward the animal that is being reintroduced. Sekhmet's release poses an immediate danger to the settlements that border the park's fence. Not only was this community subjected to forced relocation in the process of building the park, but they are now dangerously exposed to the non-human animals that populate the conservation park. Dana Phillips overviews a real-world instance of this problem in his article, "Weeping Elephants, Sensitive Man," which discusses how the cultural enfranchisement of elephants has entailed unintended—often violent—consequences for numerous villages in Southern Africa (such as the uprooting of crops), highlighting the inherent difficulty of protecting the varied interests of "wild" animals and human beings at the same time. "Such a story,"

Phillips argues, "might be said to complicate the discourse of animal rights by bringing in evidence of animal wrongs" (41). Both of these scenarios thus illustrate how rewilding must take into account whether or not it truly makes sense to spend huge amounts of time and effort to rewild an area that is ecologically different from what it once was.

Green Lion thus concludes Sekhmet's narrative on a note of unpredictability and irresolution, reinforcing the ambiguity of rewilding projects. Con observes that although Sekhmet is gone, "she still features regularly in newspaper reports. She is sighted now and then in more fantastical circumstances: scaring off muggers in an alley off Long Street or leaving her footprints at the tomb of the Muslim saint in Faure. She is held captive in a backyard shack in Lavender Hill and used in dogfights" (287). The passage continues by detailing an increasingly more and more outlandish list of Sekhmet-sighting: Sekhmet strolling on a beach at sunrise or Sekhmet lazily lounging in a playboy mansion on the outskirts of Cape Town. Though the proliferation of such images speaks, on the one hand, to the mythical status and fantastical presence of the lion in South Africa, which will continue despite the disappearance of the Cape Lion, the passage also fuses her seeming return to the realm of fantasy: irresponsible and anthropocentric attempts at rewilding, this passage suggests, can only end in delusion and fantasy.

Inheriting Loss: A Cascade of Trophies

As I've outlined above, *Green Lion* can be read as cautioning readers to the ways in which the environmentalist practices of de-extinction and rewilding often operate in a colonialist and capitalist matrix. I've overviewed these failed environmentalist approaches not with the purpose of unequivocally dismissing them, but to illuminate the difficulties of acting responsibly in the messy, entangled, ecologically impoverished world we now inhabit—an idea that Rose-Innes's usage of the trophic cascade emplottment helps capture.

Yet rather than conclude her novel with an outright negation of ecological conservation, the novel closes by outlining a third possible approach for moving forward: inheritance.

In his book, *Wake of Crows*, Thom van Dooren examines contemporary possibilities for shared life that are emerging in the context of ongoing processes of globalization, colonization, urbanization, and climate change. Moving among these diverse contexts, and across various locales, his book tells the stories of extermination and extinction alongside the fragile efforts to better understand and make room for other species. In so doing, van Dooren explores some of the possibilities that still exist for living and dying well on this damaged planet—one of which is the work of inheritance. As van Dooren explains:

> my contention is that in a "postnatural world"—one that refuses all the dangerous illusion of a wilderness that can be returned to, a nature "out there" divorced from human life—conservation must be rethought as a *work of inheritance*. This focus on the past may seem odd given the deeply uncertain future of this species at the current time, yet it is only out of these inheritances that our worlds can be crafted. … These inheritances take many forms, from genetic material and the broader landscapes and ecological communities that we are born into to the historical events, cultural traditions, and relationships that we retell, reenact, and remember. These inheritances haunt the present, for better or for worse, in often unexpected ways. (73)

For van Dooren, then, a key part of engaging with inheritance pertains to the particular histories that we tell, that we inhabit, and how they animate our understanding and action.

But how exactly does *Green Lion* understand the work of inheritance? And how does the work of inheritance engage with South Africa's colonial past in order to craft a more ecologically just present and future? After the zoo temporarily closes its doors as a result of Sekhmet's disappearance, it reopens as the revamped Green Lion Centre, a space "devoted to the interdisciplinary conjunction of Arts and Natural Sciences, under the joint auspices of the Departments of Environment, Recreation and Culture" (283). In place of its previous caged animal displays, the GLC stages performances spearheaded by Elyse (Con's ex-girlfriend), which feature actors dressed as animals and stagehands who operate animal

puppets in order to act out Afro-Indigenous and European allegories of human-animal relations. In contrast to much of the novel's muted and melancholic tone, Rose-Innes injects the performance with a sense of wonder and playfulness:

> Another sounding of the horn, and in the subsequent silence Elyse's friends come stalking out, each in creaturely form, in striped leotards and fake-fur manes and hooflike shoes that dangle from their limbs like weights and clop to the ground. … They dance instructively; they dance the fables. … They dance in a row, the stork dance, the frog dance, the dog dance … When the lion enters stage left, the effect is gorgeously achieved: the animal is amazingly realistic, its limbs manipulated by four silent black-clad players with sticks. The lion pauses, bows, roars, attacks — and limps. … At the limit of the stage, the lion lurches, its giant head swinging out, almost far enough for the kids in the front row to touch or imagine being touched by a string of lion spittle. Again, they squeal on cue. […] On stage, the play takes a turn for the charming; the lion goes to the girl and lays his head in her lap. The children are enthralled. One of the littles rises involuntarily from his seat and goes forward to be close to the stage. "It's so nice for them to see the animals," murmurs one of the parents next to him. (285-6)

Thus, while much of *Green Lion* reminds its readers of the ways in which the death of a species adversely affects the larger web of life in which it is enmeshed, Elyse's performance fosters a sense of respect, obligation, and even love for lost species. We see this through the re-enactment of the myth of St. Jerome and the lion, which chronicles how Jerome befriends a lion by removing a thorn from its paw. These performances help remind the audience (and the reader) of the importance of centering and relaying narratives that emphasize relations of care and appropriate forms of kinship. Moreover, by inviting audience members to participate in the performance, Elyse and her crew encourage participants to imagine and practice more ethical ways of life: not only in the ways we live with animals and the ways we think about them but also by transforming our values more broadly, resetting our priorities, rebooting our sense of what it might mean to be human. For as Una Chauduri observes, in her book on animal rights performances, "Whatever is said or implied by cultural performances about the other animals will inevitably—however circuitously— affect the way those animals are treated by humans out in the real world" (7).

In addition to these dramatic performances, the GLC also offers interactive displays where visitors can touch and engage with a variety of taxidermied animal displays. Importantly, these taxidermied specimens once belonged to the Carolissen family (202), and were hunted by Mark's great-great-grandfather, "a celebrated hunter" (171). Eventually, however, this inheritance began to haunt the Carolissen family, serving as a grizzly and gothic reminder of colonial violence: "The passage [of the house] was wall-to-wall furred, feathered, clawed, and winged. Bristling with the horns of a dozen different kinds of antelope. In one glass case was a tableau of a leaping caracal with a guinea fowl in its paws. The taxidermy was aged, the animals rigid and worn in patches" (44). Mrs. Carolissen succinctly summarizes her family's feelings toward "all those stuffed heads" by describing them as a "wretched menagerie" (172). Through these descriptions, Rose-Innes calls to mind a sense of the pernicious histories of greedy exploration and imperial conquest (both in the name of science) that subtend the practice and popularity of taxidermy.[168] Colonialism and species extinction thus meet at least conceptually in the taxidermy collection, which functions as a site of convergence for multiple, contested stories of life and death.

The lion in particular, Rachel Poliquin observes, "offered 'natural' proof of the turbulence of exotic landscapes and, more obliquely, stood as testimony to the validity of European colonial management. The taxidermied beasts were celebrations of all that empire stood for: dominion, courage, vigor, undaunted determination, triumph over the 'untamed,' and eventual victory" (278). As such, the longing to capture an animal's aesthetic presence with taxidermy invariably exhibits not just the animal itself, but particular (often hierarchical,

[168] Taxidermy gained momentum in the 1700s with the intensification of colonization around the world.

taxonomical, and masculine) ways of thinking about the natural world. Although collecting mania later gave way to desires to protect, save, or conserve increasingly rare creatures by the twentieth century, the preservation logic of taxidermy became so deeply entrenched in colonial histories of extermination that hunting for endangered species to preserve bits of them remains seriously debated as a hedge against their extinction.

Because of this vexed history, Mrs. Carolissen eventually donates her family's inheritance to the Green Lion Centre, which radically repurposes these historical hunting trophies:

> [the] poor animals have been given a lick of paint: they are brighter, friendlier, less macabre, their spots and stripes definitely more vivid. This was the work of Elyse and her friends. With that theatrical energy he still finds alarming, they'd taken up needles and thread, paints and latex, and knocked Gerard's stuffy old trophies into some more appealing, kid-friendly shape. And why not? It is, after all, a Centre of Arts and Sciences now, and taxidermied animals are its perfect emblems. Never particularly rigorous scientific documents, these ones are now almost wholly imaginary creations. … The children are encouraged to touch and experience: stroke the fur, put their fingers in glass eyes, pass their hands between the rows of teeth. (284)

While traditional accumulations of taxidermy effectively train a way of seeing animals as representative species types (and, in turn, a way of seeing humans as the only animals whose individuality matters), Elyse's playful reimagining of these taxidermied figures showcases their individuality and distinctiveness. Each animal figure is painted in a unique and whimsical style meant to incite a sense of wonder and excitement, rather than alleged scientific objectivity. Moreover, the touch and feel format, which urges visitors to interact with the taxidermied figures and explore alternative affective relations to the various creatures on display, overturns the conventional choreography of the museum—so often based on separation and distance.

Such an approach echoes Donna Haraway's recent writing on the practice of "intimacy without proximity," a concept she develops based on the work of Jacob Metcalf.

Haraway defines intimacy without proximity as "a presence without disturbing the critters that animate [our] projects, but with the potential for being part of work and play for confronting the exterminationist, trashy, greedy practices of global industrial economies and cultures. Intimacy without proximity is not 'virtual' presence; it is 'real' presence, but in loopy materialities. … Material play builds caring publics" (79). In contrast to the Green Lion Club's investment in establishing intimacy *through* proximity (consider their obsession with holding boa constrictors and touching Sekhmet), the Green Lion Centre imagines into being productive modes of engagement that elicit care for our non-human kin, but also respect their difference and their agency.[169] This is vital, in particular, for the protection of endangered species and habitats, which are often further harmed by well-meaning projects based on human intervention, such as ecotourism trips that organize scuba trips to see coral reefs.[170] Moreover, interacting with the taxidermy collection allows visitors to confront the colonial practices that led to the decimation of animal species (a colonial inheritance), but it also outlines a conservation strategy that allows for different possible endings and fresh conceits for moving forward. The taxidermy collection, in other words, becomes both a measure of irrevocable biological and cultural destruction as well as a means of intervening in these processes.

Green Lion, these final pages make clear, does not view conservation as a doomed project. Countering the declension narratives that so often dominate the discourse surrounding species extinction, the novel's closing moments offer an almost utopian vision

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[169] Joanna Latimer's "Being Alongside: Rethinking Relations Among Different Kinds" provides an excellent theorization of this issue. In this article, she proposes the terms "*alongsideness*," which is a form of intermittent and partial connection, [which] eschews the obfuscation of difference entrenched in contemporary emphasis on connectivity" (77).
[170] Donna Haraway discusses this topic in her 2016 book *Staying with the Trouble*.

of multispecies justice. In building this vision, the novel theorizes a model of inheritance and envisions the ways that the work of inheritance can lead to cross-generational relations of care (evidenced by the frequent references to friends and family who visit the new Green Lion Centre) and an increase in public awareness (in contrast to the histories of privatized taxidermy collections). The GLC's new developments not only seek to improve human-animal relations, but they actively push back against the capitalist systems that dictated the zoo's previous attempts at conservation by eliminating the need for "swilling out or bloody feeds," and thus reducing its money crisis (283). Instead, the zoo now offers a "rejuvenating" experience: "the development has been a success with the public. The cafeteria is open again, and families are sitting in the sun under parasols, sipping milkshakes. The crowd is cheerful, diverse" (283). Unlike the conservation approaches of de-extinction or rewilding, then, inheritance "is always something to be dwelled with—to be honored and acknowledged, even if it is not always avowed—placing us in relationship, perhaps under obligation, to those who have come before as well as those who will follow after" (88). It requires, in other words, that we engage with others in an attempt to hold open a future that does not forget the past nor attempt to reconstruct it, but rather inherits it as a dynamic and changing obligation that must be lived up to for the good of all those who do or might inhabit it.

Conclusion: Interdisciplinarity and the Trophic Cascade

In the essay, "Invasive Narratives and the Inverse of Slow Violence," a diversely trained group of academics examine a common representational bias found in environmental storytelling. They argue for the need "to unpack the ways that complicated and multifaceted environmental phenomena can be reduced to fast, simple, evocative, invasive narratives that percolate through science, legislation, policy and civic action, and to examine how these narratives can drown out rather than open up possibilities for novel social-ecological

engagements" (Twidle et al. 1). Their work in this article explores how South Africa's Invasive Alien Species program (IAS) reduces complex webs of ecological, biological, economic, and cultural relations to a simple "good" versus "bad" battle between easily discernible "natural/native" and "non-natural/invasive" identities. As they argue, any plant or animal that is designated as "alien" is immediately demonized (a rhetorical move that, as Jean and John Comaroff have shown, speaks to South Africa's contemporary anxieties over the presence of "illegal aliens" within its borders). Thus, in deploying this binary, the IAS obstructs the options available to citizens, land managers, and policymakers and prevents a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics and implications of biodiversity change, in South Africa and beyond.

This chapter has examined the ways that the ecological model of the trophic cascade, at times, yields a corollary simplification, even as it sets out to show the complexity and entanglements of keystone species removal. For the novelists in this chapter, however, this does not mean that this ecological model is useless (a perspective that would create yet another binary between the hard sciences and the humanities); rather, both Hogan and Rose-Innes consider how the affordances of the trophic cascade might blend with the affordances of the novel to reconsider the causes and consequences of the loss of a flagship species.

In both novels, trophic cascade emplottment allows for a compelling examination of the structural pressures that lead to species depletion and the ways that this loss might differently affect non-Western communities—insights that are reached *through* and with the *support* of the ecological model of the trophic cascade. By re-envisioning the trophic cascade in this way, these novels also urge us to rethink the inevitable flow, directionality, and automatism of the trophic *cascade*; it's downstream ramifications are perhaps more plural and

multivalent than traditionally conceived, which allows us to carefully consider the place of agency, choice, and contingency in particular ecological models.

Such an approach also highlights the need for modes of environmental conservation that engage with the insights of science as well as the insights of cultural analysis. Trophic cascade emplottment illustrates the potential of careful interdisciplinary work, capable of enriching environmental research with a more extensive conceptual vocabulary. The deepening environmental and social crises of our time are unfolding in a zone where the nature/culture divide collapses and the possibilities of life and death for everyone are at stake—my aim in this chapter has been to consider how narrative innovations can position both humans and non-humans as participants in lively ecologies of meaning and value, entangled within rich patterns of cultural and historical diversity that shape who we are and the ways in which we are able to "become with" others.

Perhaps surprisingly, Hogan and Rose-Innes perform this work by "thinking with" and alongside the big cat—an undeniably charismatic creature. Numerous writers, such as Ursula Heise, have persuasively articulated certain issues that might arise from a narrow focus on particularly attractive or striking species: "The focus on a single species that is selected for its obvious anthropomorphic qualities or its aesthetic appeal blocks from view other species, lacking those qualities, that may be more endangered or more crucial for ecosystemic functioning. It is doubtful that charismatic species by themselves can generate any real public understanding of how ecosystems work and what threatens their functioning" (24). While it is certainly crucial to keep these valid points in mind, my work in this chapter nevertheless insists that there are also good reasons why scientists and writers might want to focus on some species at the expense of others. As keystone species, the Florida Panther and the Cape Lion occupy/occupied crucial positions in the food web, and without them many

other species would also be endangered. Beyond this, however, these species also occupy crucial positions in our cultural and imaginative structures—and without them, we too are endangered. Recognizing this allows us to more fully register the effects of their loss, and, with this in mind, develop appropriate strategies in response.

CODA

"To whom do letters belong?"
~ Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card*

"Dear Climate, You're changing fast. We want to change with you."
~Marina Zurkow, Dear Climate Project

At its core, this project has been energized by my belief that narrative and literature are powerful mediums for examining and understanding the contemporary climate crisis. These imaginative mediums not only allow us to comprehend the gravity of anthropogenic climate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of wars, acidifying oceans, and a host of other environmental issues, but they act as valuable tools in the project of dismantling the capitalist and imperialist systems that uphold and actively shape the collapse of our planet's geophysical systems. My work has examined how novels adeptly work across disparate spatial and temporal scales, giving our planet's immense biomorphic and geomorphic changes a granular and immediate intimacy. They offer a way of overcoming the challenges posed by the vast dimensions and staggering complexity of climate change, making this elusive phenomenon visible, tangible, legible, and morally salient.

My focus on the capacities of narrative and the broader structures of the imagination also challenges the assumption that climate change is an issue of concern solely for the natural sciences and engineering practices (which would entail the assumption that climate change might best be solved with a techno-scientific fix). For, as Ursula Heise has argued, neither scientists nor anyone else knows exactly "how such a planetary transformation might affect particular places and individuals, therefore, [it] amounts to a paradigmatic exercise in 'secondhand nonexperience,' envisioning a kind of change that has not occurred before" (206). Each chapter has grappled with the process of "envisioning" by considering how

literature and literary concerns might shape our environmental and eco-activist imaginations. How does the novel model our degraded climatological conditions? How does genre illuminate questions of development and destruction in the everyday Anthropocene? And how can reconfigurations of plot complicate narratives of declension? These are all questions which reflect the significance of narrative in understanding the complexity of the Anthropocene.

To conclude this project, I would like to centralize and more explicitly meditate on the perspective that gives life to this project—that reading, writing, and storytelling are central to tackling the problems of climate disaster—by focusing on a novel that explicitly dramatizes and thematizes these concerns: *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) by Ojibwe writer Louise Erdrich.

One of the foremost chronicles of Indigenous history and contemporary Ojibwe experience, Erdrich has consistently examined the entwined processes of colonialism and environmental exploitation throughout her long and established literary career. We see this, for example, in her 1988 novel, *Tracks*, which portrays the history of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa's struggle to keep their land in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Throughout the novel, a tribal elder, Nanapush, tries to change the course of events so that the contestation over land tenure between the tribe and the white settlers, which culminates in the battle over Fleur Pillager's land, will not destroy the tribe. Although Nanapush does his best to retain Fleur's claim to the land, white lumber interests turn U.S. government policy to their advantage, and in the end, Fleur's land is lost—the forest of birchbark trees turned into paper. Erdrich has tackled other instances of Indigenous dispossession throughout her oeuvre: *The Plague of Doves* (2008), for example, details the devastating and rapid decline of the buffalo species, and *The Birchbark House* (1999) narrates the smallpox

epidemic from an Indigenous perspective. In powerful and important ways, her novels record the varieties of ecological destruction that accompany settler-colonial intrusion.

Future Home of the Living God transports the experiences of climatological and ecological dissolution into an unspecified future, which is set in Minnesota. The novel tells the story of Cedar Hawk Songmaker, a young Ojibwe woman adopted and raised by white "Minneapolis liberals," who finds out that she is pregnant. What might otherwise be a joyous occasion, becomes one of extreme uncertainty and terror, as the novel takes place in a world where climatic stability has drastically deteriorated and where species evolution has begun to move backwards in (or sporadically across) time. While the exact cause of this climatological meltdown is not pinned down within the narrative, Cedar's mom, Sera, at one point explains that scientists believe it could be the result of a "new kind of virus. Maybe bacteria. From the permafrost," which has almost entirely unthawed (8). As a result of these eccentric climate conditions, animal and vegetable species have begun to change in strange, startling ways, women start giving birth to primitive babies, spontaneous abortions become frequent, pregnancies are fatal for many mothers, and male sex organs are not developing properly. Like many of the novels examined in this dissertation, *Future Home of the Living God* traces the expansive and intimate nature of climatic shift, the way it infiltrates and affects life in numerous and unexpected ways.

Within the novel's context of climatological flux, the U.S. government devolves into a fascist regime—deemed The Church of the New Constitution, whose borders with Mexico and Canada have been closed. One of this new government's top priorities is to initiate frightening legislation allowing for the abduction (and imprisonment) of women who demonstrate the ability to reproduce "healthy" human babies. Their goal is to maintain the "integrity" of the human species (with its attendant hierarchies) amidst the climate crisis.

Eventually, all women of childbearing age become susceptible to being taken and forcefully used for procreation in "womb clinics," where their bodies become property of the state until they are no longer viable. To escape the control of this violent system, people go underground, try to hide expecting women and take them North, discard their cell phones and other screens and go back to more traditional and reliable means of communication like snail mail and face-to-face talk. The story, crucially, is narrated through a series of letters that Cedar writes to her unborn child.

My analysis dwells on the significance of epistolary writing within this novel and its depiction of a world ravaged by climate disaster. Most readings of the novel categorize it as a work of dystopian fiction, comparing it with other novels that examine crises in fertility amidst climate catastrophe, such as *Children of Men* by Alfonso Caurón and *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood.[171] I argue, however, that focusing on the novel's epistolary form (with its accompanying questions of reading, writing, and storytelling) complicates such a categorization by introducing the novel's investment in a radical hope—an articulation of hope that insists on futurity in the Anthropocene. To make this claim, I elaborate on three aspects of letter-writing: 1) The act of letter writing can and should be understood as a gesture of hope; 2) The letter enacts and evokes hope on a formal level; 3) The letter functions as a space for theorizing the possibilities of hope. Ultimately, however, these claims not only speak to the role of epistolary writing in Erdrich's novel, but they allow me to revisit and reflect on the larger claims about narrative and literary form that motivate and enliven this project.

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[171] Most interviews with Erdrich and reviews of the novel describe it as a dystopian text, clustering it with novels like Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Leni Zumas *Red Clocks*. See, for example, *Elle*'s article "Inside the Dystopian Visions of Margaret Atwood and Louise Erdrich."

Hope in Writing

The novel's first invocation of hope manifests in the mere fact of Cedar's writing. As mentioned earlier, *Future Home of the Living God* takes place in a world that has begun to unravel—politically, socially, and ecologically. Yet Cedar, as she explains in her first note, insists on writing to her unborn child:

> Apparently—I mean, nobody knows—our world is running backward. Or forward. Or maybe sideways, in a way as yet ungrasped. I am sure somebody will come up with a name for what is happening, but I cannot imagine how everything around us and everything within us can be fixed […]
>
> Historic times! There have always been letters and diaries written in times of tumult and discovered later, and my thought is that I could be writing one of those. And even though I realize that all lexical knowledge may be useless, you'll have this record. (3)

As this opening letter suggests, Cedar views her missive as imbued with a hope and potentiality, framing it as a post-disaster record of the unnamed experience that has thrown her world into chaos. By framing her letter as an object of and for the future, Cedar articulates her belief that her present will not foreclose the continuance of life (in some form or another).[172] In this sense, her letters not only function as an archive of her present experience, but they insist on the possibility of intervening in futures to come.

This is reinforced on a more personal level through her decision to dedicate this letter to her unborn and potentially inhuman child. Much like those artists, scientists, and linguists who work to communicate the threat of nuclear toxicity through deep time, Cedar must contend with the likelihood that her letter may not be legible to generations, societies, and cultures of the future (who will have a vastly different linguistic system than our own).[173]

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[172] The letter can also be read as a time-capsule or a message in a bottle—two vessels that signify hopeful perseverance in the face of overwhelming uncertainty.

[173] This topic is explored in an article in the Atlantic called "How to Send a Message 1,000 Years to the Future." In this article, the writer observes that "Our nuclear waste will far outlive us" and asks, in turn, "what technologies and narratives can we use to warn people

But by insisting on writing her letters through the medium of the written word, Cedar once more conveys a sense of hope that the human species will persist, and that her child will be able to make sense of what she's written, even if it may not have the capacity or the "lexical knowledge" to do so. This is not naivete on Cedar's part, or an instance of extreme anthropocentrism, but a conscious decision grounded, as I will illustrate momentarily, in the socio-political (and historical) positionality from which she writes.

As the novel progresses, we encounter a number of moments in which the act of writing registers as a hopeful gesture. Once Cedar goes into hiding, she receives a letter from Eddy (the husband of her biological mother, Sweetie), which talks about life on the reservation and concludes by noting "PS: Must scrawl this in: Surprise visit from the Nagamojig Bimibatoog" (97). Excitedly, Cedar explains that the last part of Eddie's letter, the postscript, "refers to song—i.e., People who sing; i.e., Songmaker." Through his strategic usage of the Ojibwe language, Eddy informs Cedar that her adoptive parents, Sera and Glen, are safe and have visited the reservation. This epistolary exchange thus demonstrates how the act of letter writing, particularly when coded, can generate a sense of hopeful insurgence. From this perspective, Eddy's writing process echoes (and riffs on) the work conducted by the Native code talkers, who used their knowledge of Indigenous languages to transmit coded messages during World War II.[174] While Native code-writers utilized their linguistic

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hundreds of generations from now?" They claim that "for starters, written language is out. In the *longue duree* it's a relatively new technology anyway, and not necessarily efficient at communicating through deep time" (online).

[174] The code talkers came from a host of Native nations, including the Lakota, Mohawk, Comanche, Tlingit, Hopi, Cree, Crow, and Meskawki. They transmitted messages over military telephone or radio communications nets using formally or informally developed codes built upon their native languages.

ability in the service of the United States, here Eddie employs it as a way of circumventing and rebelling against a fascist, dictatorial state and its technologies of surveillance.

In another hope-generating moment, Cedar, who has been captured and imprisoned in a maternity prison, receives an unexpected note from her adoptive mother, Sera. She explains, "After our check, I go into the bathroom and read the note from Sera. *You can eat this, says the last line, it's sweet rice paper and the ink is nontoxic!* I want to laugh, but I do eat the escape instructions, and they're pretty tasty" (159). Importantly, this letter, which contains Cedar's escape instructions, has been delivered by Hiro, a renegade postal worker who uses his position as a postal worker to deliver illegal letters (with escape instructions or other vital documents) to women in hiding. Hiro is able to perform this work, Cedar explains, because "the entire mail operation is funded by the cash exchange between the customer and the mail carrier. … Mail service has become the only reliable form of long-distance communication, and everyone uses it now" (94).[175] The act of writing—and of delivering—mail is thus central to creating a larger social system of hope, one which eludes and opposes the oppressive regimes of the State.[176]

In these various examples, then, letter writing is understood as an act of circulating and negotiating hope. Despite the dystopian circumstance from which they are written, these

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[175] Cedar further explains that "the United States Postal Service has apparently conducted secret negotiations with the National Guard and they've formed a joint entity within some states" (94). The postal service and the postal office figure in important ways throughout the novel. In a later scene, Cedar escapes from imprisonment and seeks refuge in the Minneapolis Post Office.

[176] In her book, *Epistolarity and World Literature*, Rachel Bower explains that "letters, real and literary, have often been written under circumstances in which letter writing is very difficult: where letters are banned or movement restricted; where war, incarceration, forced migration and foreign occupation separate people; where the dialogue between two people becomes an act of political opposition" (110). Many of these circumstances appear in Erdrich's novel as a result of climate disaster.

letters (and their writers) insist on the future as a site of inhabitation and they emphasize the belief that structures of kinship might persevere across time. They can thus be read as instances of "writing to the future—where, in order for the letter to be received, the writer must imagine, and have faith in, a future that is not identical with the present conditions under which she writes" (110). As Cedar continues to write her letters, she undergoes moments of fear and insecurity—but she nevertheless continues to write, and in doing so, she resists the crushing present conditions of her existence.

Epistolarity and Hope

Beyond depicting letter writing as an act of hope, Erdrich's novel also draws upon the formal properties of the epistle to summon and incite hope. To elaborate on how Erdirch's novel achieves this, we can turn to Janet Gurkin Altman's *Epistolarity* (1982), which provides perhaps the most in-depth and influential theorization of the epistolary form in literary fiction.[177] In this book, Altman reads a range of literary texts to outline a number of the intriguingly persistent patterns and properties of the epistolary genre. These properties—what she calls "vehicles of expression"—include: 1) the letter's "*I-you* structure"; 2) the letter's "particular usage of the present tense"; 3) the letter's "temporal polyvalence" (117-8). Together, these grammatical, temporal, and relational features contribute to the epistolary form's distinct approach to creating meaning.

While all three of these characteristics can be found within *Future Home of the Living God*, my discussion will focus on what Altman defines as the letter's *I-you* structure, which is most directly relevant for my interest in the question of hope. As Altman explains, the "*I-you* interpersonal bond [is] basic to the very language of the letter" and necessarily structures

[177] Altman defines epistolarity as "the use of the letter's formal properties to create meaning," though she later nuances and complicates this definition (4).

meaning in epistolary narrative (118). "Those works that we perceive as being the most epistolary, as cultivating the letter form most fully," she explains, "are those in which the *I-you* relationship shapes the language used, and in which *I* becomes defined relative to the *you* whom he addresses" (118). In Erdrich's text, the *I* (the addressor) is Cedar and the *you* (the addressee) is her unborn child. This grammar structures the novel, influencing what circumstances Cedar chooses to chronicle and the manner in which they are conveyed.

Importantly, though, Cedar's letters also complicate the conventional dynamics of the *I-you* structure by radically destabilizing the parameters that are commonly associated with the *you* (that is, the recipient of the letter). While there is always a certain degree of flexibility around who qualifies as a *you* within the epistolary framework (as Altman herself acknowledges), Cedar stretches this formal element to an astonishing degree: her addressee is not yet born and, as previously discussed, potentially inhuman. Through is unconventional deployment of the *I-you* structure, the text models and illuminates the importance of valuing non-normative understandings of kinship in the Anthropocene. And, in doing so, it creates space for imagining alternative visions of futurity and sociality in the context of climate collapse. (Moreover, the text contributes to an increasingly common figure that has populated this project: the child of the Anthropocene. Examples include Esch's unborn child in *Salvage the Bones*, Oceán in *Archipelago*, Maria in *The Water Knife* and Oblivia in *The Swan Book*.)[178]

This unconventional relationship, framed by the *I-you*, also operates in important ways on an extra-diegetic level. As numerous critics have explained, the child has long

[178] The figure surfaces across a wide range of climate fiction not observed in this project. In *Gold Fame Citrus*, for example, the protagonists raise a seemingly posthuman child named Ig.

figured as a proxy for the future of the human species.[179] Recently, however, this synecdochal relationship has metamorphosed in light of the future's increasing instability. Rebekah Sheldon examines this shift in her book, *The Child to Come,* where she argues:

> Like her antecedents, the child as resource is freighted with expectations and anxieties about the future. Unlike them, however, she is tethered to a future that can no longer be taken for granted. For all the heavy weather of global climate change and all the suffering born of industrialism—extinctions, droughts, melting ice caps, rising sea levels, oil spills, poor air quality, and ocean acidification, to name a few—much of the horror of ecological disaster comes from the projected harm to the future these things portend. And the future is the provenance of the child. (3)

In other words, Sheldon argues that in the Anthropocene, the child has become a site of intense discursive investment, standing in for life-itself in a period of vibrantly (and virulently) resurgent materialisms of all kinds.[180] Similarly, Erdrich's novel uses the child to index the uncertain and unstable futures of the Anthropocene. Cedar's unbreakable attachment to this posthuman child thus models a hopeful orientation to the future, broadly speaking, even if it is a vision of the future that humans may not have clarity on or a firm place in.

Finally, the parameters of the *you* can be expanded to include not only inhuman addressees and posthuman futures, but to also include the novel's readers—what Rachel Bower describes as a "layering of readers," which is unique to the epistolary form (as with above, this occurs on an extra-diegetic level). While it is possible to understand the *you* as an address to the novel's reader in much epistolary fiction, Erdrich underscores her novel's layered quality through Cedar's explanation that she plans to give her journal the title of

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[179] See, for example, *Strange Dislocations* by Carolyn Steedman or, from a queer theory angle, Lee Edelman's *No Future*.

[180] Sheldon elaborates on her project by noting: "*The Child to Come* is about this child—the child as resource—and the figurative and literal uses to which we put her in an age riven between unprecedented technoscientific control and equally unprecedented ecological disaster" (2-3).

"Future Home of the Living God" (171). The archive of letters that Cedar writes to her child thus becomes, through a playful meta-fictional maneuver, the same collection of letters that we encounter as readers of *Future Home of the Living God*. In layering the letter's readers/addressees, the epistolary form effectively hails or interpolates us into its imagined world, urging us to engage with its politics of hope.[181] When Cedar writes "Things can start over with you, and things need to start over. You deserve more" we can and should take this address personally. Her letter directly reminds us that we too deserve more than the ecologically unstable world we have inherited and that we are set to bequeath, and it urges us to remember that a better future is not foreclosed. Through this anachronistic maneuver, her letter invites us to actively consider what we can do to forestall futures like the one that Cedar describes and experiences.[182]

Theorizing Hope

Numerous characters in Erdrich's novel ruminate on the potentialities of hope within the context of climate disaster. In one letter, for example, Cedar chronicles a story shared by her grandma about how her grandma's mother once decided to keep a child that was said to be an offspring of the devil (and who had blue marks on his skin to "prove" it); in another letter, Cedar discusses how her biological mother's decision to leave her with

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[181] As Altman puts it, "to write a letter is not only to define oneself in relationship to a particular *you;* it is also an attempt to draw that *you* into becoming the *I* of a new statement" (55).

[182] With this understanding in mind, Cedar takes on the role of a "future chronicler" who tells the tale of climate catastrophe and the near end of the human species in order to mobilize activist potential in those reading her letter from the future. Stef Craps identifies this trait in his article "Climate Change and the Art of Anticipatory Memory." Here, he examines how certain writers in the Anthropocene destabilize our security in the present through depictions of anticipatory retrospection. "Making sense of our existence in this day and age" he explains, "requires that we adopt a posthumous stance from which we can look back on our impending extinction as a species" (486). This can be understood as the "fictional future history of the present."

Glenn was also founded on hope. Toward the novel's end, however, we encounter what is perhaps the novel's most sustained and explicit meditation on hope in the Anthropocene: a story, told and transcribed by Eddy, which describes how his life was saved by a pebble. [183] In this story, called "The Pebble," Eddy talks about his experience suffering from crippling depression after a staggering economic setback. Within this state of depression, "not one aspect of the world could appeal to [him]" and there "were no colors. Everything was neutral" (260). As a result, he decides that he must end his life by hanging himself from a tree. When he sets out to meet this fate, however, something unexpected occurs:

> As I walked with a length of rope toward the woods out back of the shop, a pebble flipped into my shoe. It hurt. Each step was painful. I stopped, and removed it. The stone was a bit of ferric oxide, earthly banded hematite, strayed from the Mesabi Range, where one-third of the world's iron ore was at one time located. This piece of stone was laid down as a sediment in the Animikean sea sometime during the middle Precambrian period in Minnesota, and was probably between 2.6 and 1.6 billion years old. The pebble was a rich, deep, hot, clay red, striated and shaped like a tiny toaster. (260)

Tossing this ancient pebble over his shoulder, Eddy continues down the path, determined to end his life. Once more, however, he is stopped by a pebble (this time it is a shard of graywacke, approximately 3.5 billion years old) and once more he flings the rock aside. Nevertheless, the pebbles continue to interrupt Eddy's walk, and after two more disruption, he eventually reconsiders his actions:

> I don't know why they want me here on earth, the little rocks. I don't know why they care about me as they do. I only know that by the time I reached the tree I had no choice but to fling the rope away from myself. I turned back, my fingers rubbing the little agate. All the way back to the store note a single rock slipped underfoot. (261)

This series of encounters does not completely remedy Eddy's depression. As the novel depicts, he continues to struggle with his self-described "melancholia" for much of his life

[183] Cedar has torn this letter out of Eddy's manuscript, which she then inserts into her letter.

(27). However, I highlight this episode as it speaks to one of the major lessons that he teaches Cedar during their time together: that endurance can pave the way for more hopeful futures in the Anthropocene.

In her book, *Hope at Sea*, Teresa Shewry theorizes endurance as an essential aspect of hope. As she explains, "For many writers concerned for environmental politics in the aftermath of imperial histories, it is all too obvious that endurance—not only of life forms and ecosystems, but also of commitments, practices, understandings, and memories—allows awareness of future promise and openness" (29). This is particularly important in the context of settler-colonialism and imperial expansion, which were based on the brutal negation, diminishment, and dismissal of existing peoples and ecologies. The Ojibwe peoples (of which Eddy and Cedar are part of), for example, were dispossessed of their ancestral lands by Anglo-American and Canadian settlers, who sought to create new, neo-European eco-systems and societies. As part of this process, Ojibwe land was divided in small allotments and logged for the mass production of paper and timber.[184] This was not only an economic strategy, but a colonial technique for obliterating sovereignty, kinship, and Indigenous ways of relating to the land.

Endurance therefore constitutes an important strategy for remaining hopeful in the shadow of the eco-social violence indexed by the Anthropocene. Importantly, endurance should not be confused with a tendency toward stasis or with problematic notions of maintaining and sustaining the world just as it is; nor should it be conflated with acceptance

[184] This is the central concern of Erdrich's novel *Tracks* (1988), which, as I discuss earlier in the coda, chronicles the disruptive and far-reaching ramifications of the Dawes Act.

or a lack of agency.[185] Rather, as Elizabeth Povinelli explains, endurance stretches from the present configuration of life to the "spaces of potentiality" that also form a part of life's existence (113). From this vantage, endurance marks a struggle to allow a being, as well as its potentials, to exist across time—even if this involves selectively changing or maintaining certain conditions of that existence. Moreover, it is a struggle to open up the question of what and who can persist long enough to shape the future, either from one moment to the next or into the long term.

Eddy's story evokes endurance through the various pebbles that he encounters during his walk. In contrast to the relatively short human lifespan, these various pebbles have endured for millions if not billions of years (the youngest is "several million years old"). Each time that Eddy encounters one of these rocks, he is struck by and remarks upon their incredible longevity and durability. And in their longevity, they encourage Eddy to endure and rethink his present circumstances. Importantly, however, Eddy's commitment to endurance should register not only a hopeful gesture, but as an anti-colonial one: it defies the dehumanizing economic structures of American empire, which have triggered Eddy's decision to take his own life in the first place. From this perspective, Eddie's encounters with these pebbles dramatizes a moment in which he works through and disrupts the inter-generational trauma of colonial ecocide—a long and continually unfolding structure of violence.[186]As he puts it in a conversation with Cedar, "[the world] is always going to

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[185] As numerous recent incidents have shown, Indigenous communities—both globally and across the U.S. consistently and effectively advocate for their sovereignty and for their right to self-determination.

[186] In his field-defining article "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Patrick Wolfe explains that "settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event. […] Elimination is an organizing principal of settler-colonial society rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence" (388).

pieces… We'll adapt" (28). His hopeful decision can thus be understood as a politicized statement on who and or what gets to endure or has the right to hope for a more just future.

Upon securing his conviction to endure, Eddy does not re-establish an anthropocentric hierarchy. His re-telling of this experience affirms non-human agency: the pebbles "want" him to remain on earth, they "care" for him and his well-being—they are, as he puts it, "living thing[s]" (261). Instead, Eddy folds himself into their narrative, framing himself within a larger ecological assemblage and its varied forces, processes, and life forms. His actions thus illuminate an alternative, less destructive, imagining of the Anthropocene: he does not leave his imprint on the rocks, rather they leave their imprint on him. Eddy's actions enable us to critically rethink, through the prism of the Anthropocene, what geographer Doreen Massey calls "the ancient manoeverings of life and rock" (2006). In this vein, "The Pebble" allegorizes how humans might rethink their actions to survive and flourish in the Anthropocene.

In this coda, I have chosen to focus on the relationship between hope and the epistle as a way of revisiting and more explicitly engaging with my project's driving questions and concerns. Erdrich's critical exploration of hope, through the epistolary form, reinforces my contention that narrative can act as a conduit for helping us define our perception of climate change, while drawing out its social and political, as well as philosophical and ethical implications. Even though the novel ends on note of tense ambiguity and irresolution, with Cedar once more imprisoned and stripped of her recently born (human) baby, her narrative continually develops strategies of hope that we too might deploy in our own unravelling world.

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While the other novels that I have examined throughout this dissertation are not epistolary novels, they nevertheless speak to and represent the importance of reading, writing, and storytelling in the Anthropocene.[187] My first chapter examined the ways in which novels can effectively model the complex temporalities of hurricanes, dislocating them from their typical associations with the swiftness of punctual violence. In chapter two, I consider how the scalar versatility of the bildungsroman genre taps into and communicates the developmental dynamics that lead to and exacerbate the conditions of megadrought in the Anthropocene. My final chapter investigates how novelists plot the extinction of keystone species to enact the ripple effects of the trophic cascade. Together, these Anthropocene stories have the power to disturb and to surprise, hopefully goading their readers toward new ways of thinking and feeling about the planet we have inherited and the planet we will bequeath.

Just as vitally, these narratives foreground the deep colonial histories and ongoing imperialisms that animate the Anthropocene. Considering the Anthropocene as a colonial formation, they show, enables us to attend to the significant power differentials that exist between the North and South, encouraging us, in turn, to refrain from effacing important differences. At the same time, however, these novels also illustrate how acknowledging the deep colonial imprint of the Anthropocene attunes us to the anti-colonial strategies of environmentalist resistance that take shape across borders, and resonate with one another in telling and evocative ways. Therefore, while the category of hope has not been explicitly theorized or examined in each of the novel's I engage with in this dissertation, each chapter

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[187] For, as Adeline Johns Putra writes in her study of climate fiction, "research at the interface of narratology and neurophysiology has shown that narratives have a greater impact than non-narrative modes of communication, because the experience which is simulated in reading them is a powerful means of forming attitudes" (245).

nevertheless expresses an orientation toward the possibility of hope and survival. This is a vital insight considering the inclination that many writers from the global North evince toward the categories of apocalypse and dystopia.[188]

Throughout this project, my personal hope has been that my own act of writing has contributed to the ever-evolving and increasingly complex debates surrounding the Anthropocene—in this way, my project too might be considered a letter (one of hope, love, indictment, instruction, and archiving) to our climate-changed world. The writer and critic Amitav Ghosh has voiced his surprise at the apparent dearth of literary engagements with climate fiction, arguing that we need further imaginative engagement with the most formidable issue of our generation. While I agree with Ghosh in that I would gladly welcome an influx of climate fiction, my project also makes the case that we, as readers, might be more attentive to the ways that climate change already frequents, shapes, and colors the literary imagination. From this perspective, the job of the reader and critic entails observing these literary endeavors and writing back to such imaginative engagements. This is necessary work for those of us confronting the reality that our climate is currently (and has long been) changing, and, moreover, who recognize that we must change with it in order to survive.

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[188] Numerous critics have critiqued this dystopian turn in environmental thinking. See, for example, Lois Zamora's essay "The Myth of Apocalypse and the American Literary Imagination" or Kyle Powys Whyte's essays "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now" and "Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene."

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